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MEDITATIONS & READINGS
FOR EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR

VOLUME I.—PART II.

EPIPHANY SEPTUAGESIMA

Edited by Rev. J. B. Coyle, C.SS.R.

VISITS TO THE MOST BLESSED SACRAMENT and TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, with Prayers for Mass, Preparation for Communion, Thanksgiving, etc. By ST. ALPHONSUS. From 2/6 to 5/-.

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Meditations and Readings

FOR

EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR

Selected from the Spiritual Writings of

SAINT ALPHONSUS

VOLUME ONE.

PART II.

Edited by

JOHN BAPT. COYLE, C.SS.R.

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Superioris Generalis et Rectoris Majoris.

Letter from His Eminence Michael Cardinal Logue, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland.

✠

ARA COELI,
ARMAGH,
16*th March*, 1924.

MY DEAR FATHER COYLE,

I have put off writing to thank you for your interesting and edifying volume, *Meditations and Readings for Every Day of the Year*, till I should find time to look through it. I have done so now, and I can congratulate you on undertaking a very useful work; and I hope you will be spared till you complete it.

The Ascetic Works of St. Alphonsus have done wonders in conveying solid instruction, nourishing piety and exciting fervour among the people in every stage and state of life. They have been an ever enduring source of piety, especially in inspiring love of our Holy Redeemer, and tender devotion towards His Blessed Mother. It is a question whether his great Theological Works have contributed more to the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Hence it was not without regret I noticed that these Spiritual Works were not so common among the people

10.502

as they were in my early days. They seemed to be giving place to more showy and superficial modern works which are far from breathing the fervent spirit of the great Doctor and Saint. One of the chief fruits which I expect from the work you have undertaken is the redress of this serious spiritual loss.

You have commenced well, and I trust you will be able to continue till the Spiritual Works of St. Alphonsus are again as extensively circulated among the people as they were in the past. The scheme you have sketched out for yourself will familiarize the people with the beauty and fervour of St. Alphonsus' Works, and from using your volumes for casual reading they will be likely to drink more deeply of the source of fervour the Saint has opened up to them.

Wishing you every blessing and success in your useful work,

I am,

Dear Fr. Coyle,

Yours gratefully,

✠ MICHAEL CARD. LOGUE.

Letter of Approbation and Blessing from Most Rev. Patrick Murray, Superior General and Rector Major of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

✠

J.M.J.A.T. SANT' ALFONSO—VIA MERULANA.

ROMA.

23rd *October*, 1923.

MY DEAR FATHER COYLE,

I am very glad to hear that you have the first part of your *Meditations and Readings for Every Day of the Year from the Writings of St. Alphonsus* ready for publication, and I wish this and the succeeding volumes every success. It is difficult to exaggerate the value of these *Meditations and Readings* as is seen from the following statements of two Popes.

His Holiness Pope Pius IX., in speaking of the writings of St. Alphonsus wrote : " The works of this most holy and learned man, written with extraordinary tender piety and devotion, breathe in every page a great love for Jesus Christ and great confidence in His mercy and merits. They also inspire their readers with the most ardent devotion to the Virgin Mother of God and to the Saints, and they inflame the hearts of men with the desire of receiving the Sacraments, as well as furnish a most abundant supply of excellent admonitions, counsels and directions to those who labour for the salvation of souls."

Pope Benedict XV., also wrote recently, on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Doctorate of St. Alphonsus, that the excellence and utility of his teaching are becoming every day more apparent, and that his

writings are helpful, not only to Theologians and Professors of the Sacred Sciences, but also to the faithful of every condition of life, to whom he points out the way to solid virtue, and smoothes for them the path to the highest Christian perfection. His Holiness adds that the Saint's one great ambition in all his writings was to make known to all men the infinite amiability of Jesus Christ.

It is unnecessary for me to add anything to these words of two Popes. I wish only to say that this infinite amiability of Jesus Christ is particularly well shown in the present volume, for, in addition to the Meditations and Readings on the Religious State and on other subjects, there are given about forty Meditations on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, in which are contained some of the most beautiful and devotional pages written by the Saint. Moreover, the division of the ascetic writings of the Saint into two Meditations and a Spiritual Reading for every day of the year, and this arranged in such a way as not to interrupt the sequence of any work of the Saint, will please many, both in the Cloister and in the world, who desire to know and follow in their spiritual life the teachings of this great Doctor of the Church and Director of Souls.

In conclusion, in the name of Saint Alphonsus, I bless you and these *Meditations and Readings* with the hope that they may be everywhere known and read and well thought on so that all may know the infinite amiability and mercy of Jesus Christ and the unspeakable amiability and mercy of His Blessed Mother, and that they may thus seek and love and serve Them alone.

Your devoted servant and confrère,

PATRICK MURRAY, C.SS.R.,
Sup. Gen. and Rector Major.

Rev. J. B. Coyle, C.SS.R.,
St. Joseph's,
Dundalk.

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MEDITATIONS AND READINGS

Monday—First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE BODY IN THE GRAVE.

Christian soul, follow the advice of St. Chrysostom: "Go to the grave. Contemplate there, dust, ashes, worms—and sigh!" O God, that body pampered with so many delicacies, clothed with so much pomp—see to what it is reduced! The worms, after having consumed all the flesh, devour one another, and in the end nothing remains but a fetid skeleton.

I.

Behold how the corpse first turns yellow and then black. Afterwards the entire body is covered with a white disgusting mould; then comes forth a clammy, fetid slime which flows to the earth. In that putrid mass is generated a great multitude of worms which feed on the flesh. Rats come to feast on the body; some attack it on the outside; others enter into the mouth and bowels. The cheeks, the lips, and the hair fall off. The ribs are first laid bare, and then the arms and legs. The worms, after having consumed all the flesh, devour one another; and in the end, nothing remains but a fetid skeleton which in the course of time falls to pieces.

The bones separate from one another and the head separates from the body. *They became like the chaff of a summer threshing-floor, and they were carried away by the wind.*—(Dan. ii., 35). Behold what man is: he is a little dust on the threshing-floor which is blown away by the wind.

Behold a young nobleman who was the life and soul of conversation: where is he now? Enter his apartment: he is no longer there. If you look for his bed, his robes, or his armour, you will find that they have passed into the hands of others. If you wish to see him, turn to the grave where he is changed into corruption and withered bones. O God, that body, pampered with so many delicacies, clothed with so much pomp, and attended by so many servants, to what is it now reduced? O ye Saints, who knew how to mortify your bodies for the love of that God Whom alone you loved on this earth, you well understood the end of all human greatness, of all earthly delights! Now your bones are honoured as sacred Relics, and preserved in shrines of gold, and your souls are happy in the enjoyment of God, awaiting the last day on which your bodies shall be made partners of your glory, as they have been partakers of your cross in this life. True love for the body consists in treating it here with rigour and contempt, that hereafter it may be happy, and in now refusing it all pleasures which may make it miserable for eternity.

Behold, then, O my God, to what this body by which I have so much offended Thee, must be reduced! To worms and rottenness! This does not afflict me; on the contrary I rejoice that this flesh of mine which has made me lose Thee, my Sovereign Good, will one day rot and be consumed. What grieves me is that to indulge in these wretched pleasures, I have given so much displeasure to Thee. But I will not despair of Thy mercy. Thou hast waited for me in order to pardon me. Thou wilt forgive me if I repent. O Infinite Goodness, I repent with my whole heart of having despised Thee. I will say with St. Catherine of Genoa: *My Jesus, no more sins! No more sins!* I

will no longer abuse Thy patience. I will not wait till the hour of death to begin to love Thee. From this moment I love Thee. I embrace Thee and unite myself to Thee, and I promise never again to depart from Thee. O most holy Virgin, bind me to Jesus Christ and obtain for me the grace never to lose Him more.

II.

In this picture of death behold yourself, and what you must one day become. *Remember that dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.* Consider that in a few years, and perhaps in a few months or days, you will become rottenness and worms. By this thought Job became a Saint. *I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father: to worms, my mother and my sister.* (Job, xvii., 14).

All must end; and if, after death, you lose your soul all will be lost for you. Consider yourself already dead, says St. Laurence Justinian, since you know that you must of necessity die. If you were already dead, what would you not desire to have done? Now that you are alive, reflect that you will one day be among the dead. St. Bonaventure says, that to guide the vessel safely, the pilot must remain at the helm, and in like manner, to lead a good life, a man should always imagine himself at the hour of death. "Look at the sins of your youth, and be covered with shame!" says St. Bernard. "Look at the sins of your manhood, and weep! Look at the disorders of your present life, and tremble!"

When St. Camillus of Lellis saw the graves of the dead, he said within himself: If these could return to life, what would they not do for eternal glory? And I, who have time,—what do I do for my soul? This the Saint said through humility. But you, perhaps, have reason to fear that you are the barren fig-tree of which the Lord spoke: *Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none.*—(Luke, xiii., 7). You have been in this world for more than three years, and what fruit have you produced? Remember,

says St. Bernard, that the Lord seeks not only flowers but fruits; that is, not only good desires and resolutions, but also holy works. Learn then to profit by the time which God in His mercy gives you. Do not wait until you shall crave for time to do good, when time shall be no more. Do not wait till you are told: *Time shall be no more.*—(Apoc. x., 6). Depart! The time for leaving this world has arrived. What is done, is done!

Behold, O my God, I am that tree which deserved for so many years to hear from Thee: *Cut it down! Why cumbereth it the ground?*—(Luke, xiii., 7). Yes; during the many years which I have been in the world, I have brought forth no other fruit than the briers and thorns of sin. But, O Lord, Thou dost not wish that I despair. Thou hast said to all, that he who seeks Thee shall find Thee. I seek Thee, O my God, and wish for Thy grace. For all the offences I have offered to Thee I am sorry with my whole heart. I would wish to die of sorrow for them. Hitherto I have fled from Thee, but now I prefer Thy friendship to the possession of all the kingdoms of the earth. I will no longer resist Thy invitations. Dost Thou wish me to be all Thine? I give Thee my whole being without reserve. Thou gavest Thyself entirely to me on the Cross. I give myself entirely to Thee. O Mary, my great advocate, do thou also listen to my cry and pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading.

ORIGINAL SIN.

To fulfil his duties in life, it is necessary for man to know what is his Last End in which he may find his perfect happiness. Man's Last End is to love and serve God in this life, and to enjoy Him for eternity in the next. Thus, God has placed us in this world not to

acquire riches, honours and pleasures, but to obey His Commandments, and, by observance of them, to gain the eternal Beatitude of Paradise.

For this end the Lord created Adam who was the first man, and gave him Eve for his wife, that from them mankind might be propagated. He created them in sanctifying grace, and placed them in the terrestrial paradise, with the promise that they should be thence transferred to Heaven to enjoy complete and eternal felicity. During their sojourn on this earth God gave them for their food all the fruits of that garden of delights; but, to try their obedience, He forbade them to eat the fruit of only one tree which He pointed out to them. But Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and ate the forbidden fruit. For this sin they were deprived of divine grace, were instantly banished from Paradise, and as rebels to the divine Majesty, were with all their posterity condemned to temporal and eternal death. Thus was Heaven shut against them and all their descendants.

This is the *Original sin* in which, as children of a rebellious father, we are all born children of wrath and enemies of God. When a vassal rebels against his sovereign, all the descendants of the rebel become hateful to the prince and are banished from the kingdom. Thus Original sin, by the disobedience of Adam, deprives us all of the grace of God.

According to the doctrine of the Church, the Blessed Virgin Mary had the privilege of being exempt from this Original guilt. It is certain that she was also free from all actual sin. Such is the doctrine of the Church, as the Council of Trent has declared: "If any one saith that a man once justified . . . . is able, during his whole life, to avoid all sins, even those that are venial—except by a special privilege from God, as the Church holds in regard of the Blessed Virgin—let him be anathema." But if Mary contracted no guilt from which she required to be redeemed, must it be said that she was not redeemed by Jesus Christ as all the other children of Adam? No; she was redeemed, but redeemed in a more excellent manner. Others are redeemed

after having incurred Original guilt; Mary was redeemed *by being preserved from it.* And this privilege was justly given to her alone—that blessed Woman whom God had predestined to be His own Mother. Still more was it becoming that God should preserve Mary from Original sin, for He destined her to crush the head of that infernal serpent, which, by seducing our first parents, entailed death upon all men : and this the Lord foretold : *I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head.*—(Gen. iii., 15). But if Mary was to be that Valiant Woman brought into the world to conquer Lucifer, certainly it was not becoming that he should first conquer her, and make her his slave; but it was reasonable that she should be preserved from all stain, and even momentary subjection to her opponent. The proud spirit endeavoured to infect the most pure soul of this Virgin with his venom, as he had already infected the whole human race. But praised and ever blessed be God, Who in His infinite goodness, pre-endowed her for this purpose with such great grace, that remaining always free from guilt of any sin, she was ever able to beat down and confound his pride, as an ancient author writes : " Since the devil is the head of Original sin, this head it was that Mary crushed : for sin never had any entry into the soul of this Blessed Virgin, which was consequently free from all stain." And St. Bonaventure more expressly says : " It was becoming that the Blessed Virgin Mary, by whom our shame was to be blotted out, and by whom the devil was to be conquered, should never, not even for a moment, have been under his dominion."*

With the one exception of God's glorious Mother all the rest of mankind are born infected with the sin of Adam, in punishment of which our understanding is darkened to the knowledge of Eternal Truth and our will inclined to evil. But by the merits of Jesus Christ we obtain at

* In the Bull "Ineffabilis Deus" Pius IX., in the year 1854, solemnly defined as an Article of Faith that the Most Blessed Virgin was from the first moment of her conception preserved by God from all stain of Original Sin. More than 100 years before the Immaculate Conception was defined by Pius IX. St. Alphonsus bound himself by vow to defend it.—EDITOR.

our Baptism Divine Grace and the remedy for all our miseries. We thus become the adopted sons of God and heirs of Paradise provided we persevere till death in the Grace of God. If we lose Divine Grace by mortal sin, and do not receive pardon, we shall be condemned to hell. We can obtain the pardon of mortal sin in the Sacrament of Penance.

Evening Meditation.

THE GREAT DIGNITY AND ADVANTAGES OF A SOUL IN GOD'S GRACE.

I.

If, says the Lord, *thou wilt separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth.*—(Jer. xv., 19). They who know how to distinguish what is precious from what is vile, are like God "Who knows how to refuse the evil and to choose the good." Let us consider how great a good it is to be in the grace of God. Men do not understand the value of divine grace. *Man knoweth not the price thereof.*—(Job xxxviii., 13). Hence they exchange it for vanity, for a little earth, or for a beastly pleasure! But it is an infinite treasure which makes us worthy of the friendship of God. *For*, says the Wise Man, *she is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use become the friends of God.*—(Wis. vii., 14). Hence a soul in grace is the friend of God. The Gentiles, who were deprived of the light of Faith, deemed it impossible for a creature to attain to the friendship of God; and they, guided only by the light of nature, could scarcely think otherwise. But God has declared in several places in the Holy Scriptures, that by means of grace we become His friends if we observe His Law. *You are my friends if you do the things that I*

command you. I will not now call you servants . . . but I have called you friends.—(Jo. xv., 14, 15). Hence, St. Gregory exclaims : " O Goodness of God ! We do not deserve to be called even servants and He condescends to call us friends !"

How fortunate would the man esteem himself who should have a king for his friend ! In a vassal it would be temerity to presume to seek the friendship of his sovereign, but it is not temerity in a soul to aspire to the friendship of its God. The most men can expect to gain in the service of an emperor is, to become his friends ; and should they succeed in gaining his friendship, they will expose their eternal salvation to greater risk. It is with difficulty I can ever become the friend of Cæsar, but if I wish, I am this moment the friend of God.

Whosoever is in the state of grace is the friend of God. He also becomes the child of God : *You are gods and the sons of the Most High.*—(Ps. lxxxi., 6). This is the great gift which we have received from the divine love through Jesus Christ. *Behold,* says St. John, *what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called, and should be, the sons of God.*—(1 Jo. iii., 1). Moreover, the soul in the state of grace is the spouse of God. *I will espouse thee to me in faith.*—(Osee, ii., 20). Lastly, the soul in grace is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Sister Mary d'Oignies saw a devil go out from an infant who was receiving Baptism, and the Holy Ghost enter with a multitude of Angels.

Therefore, O my God, when my soul had the happiness of being in Thy grace, it was Thy friend, Thy child, Thy spouse, and Thy temple ; but by committing sin, it lost all and became Thy enemy and the slave of hell. But I thank Thee, O my God, for giving me time to recover Thy grace. I am sorry above all things for having offended Thee, O infinite Goodness, and I love Thee above all things. Ah ! receive me again into Thy friendship. For Thy Mercy's sake do not reject me. I know that I deserve to be banished from Thy face, but by the Sacrifice which He offered on Calvary, Jesus Christ has

merited for me mercy and pardon. *And lead us not into temptation.* Ah! do not permit my enemies to tempt me so that I may be conquered. *But deliver us from evil.* Deliver me from hell; but deliver me first from sin, which alone can lead me to hell. O Mary, pray for me and preserve me from the great misfortune of ever seeing myself in sin and deprived of the grace of thy God and mine.

II.

St. Thomas of Aquin says that the gift of God's grace surpasses all created nature since it is a participation of the divine nature. And St. Peter said the same: *that by these ye may be made partakers of the divine nature.*—(2 Pet. i., 4). Such great things Jesus Christ merited for us by His Passion: He has even communicated to us the same splendour that He received from the Father. *And the glory which thou hast given to me, I have given to them.*—(John xvii., 22). In fine, a soul in the state of grace is one with God. *He*, says St. Paul, *that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.*—(Cor. vi., 17). The Redeemer has said that in a soul that loves God, the Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity dwell. *If any one love me, my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and we will make our abode with him.*—(John xiv., 23).

So great is the beauty of a soul in the state of grace, that God Himself extols it. *How beautiful art thou! How beautiful art thou!*—(Cant. iv., 1). The Lord appears never to take His eyes off the soul that loves Him, nor to close His ears to its petitions. *The eyes of the Lord are upon the just: and his ears unto their prayers.*—(Ps. xxxiii., 16). St. Bridget used to say that one could not behold the beauty of a soul in the grace of God and not die for very joy. And St. Catherine of Sienna seeing a soul in the state of grace, said that she would willingly have given her life to prevent that soul from losing such beauty. Hence she kissed the ground on which priests walked, because through them souls recover the grace of God.

How many treasures of merits can a soul in the state of grace acquire? Each moment it can merit an eternity of glory. St. Thomas teaches that every act of love merits for the soul eternal life. Why then should we envy the great ones of the earth? If we are in the grace of God, we can constantly acquire far more greatness in Heaven. A certain Lay-Brother of the Society of Jesus, appeared after death, and said that he and Philip the Second of Spain were in the enjoyment of glory; but that his glory in Heaven was as far superior to that of Philip, as that monarch was raised above him on this earth. Moreover, he alone who has experienced it can conceive the peace which a soul in the grace of God enjoys even in this life. *O taste and see that the Lord is sweet.*—(Ps. xxxiii., 9). The words of the Lord cannot fail. *Much peace have they that love thy law.*—(Ps. cxviii., 165). The peace of a soul united with God, surpasses all the pleasures of the senses and the world. *The peace of God which surpasseth all understanding.*—(Phil. iv., 7).

O my Jesus, Thou art the good Shepherd, Who allowed Thyself to be slaughtered in order to give life to Thy sheep. When I fled away from Thee, Thou didst not cease to follow and seek after me. Thou receivest me now that I seek Thee and cast myself with a penitent heart at Thy feet. Give me Thy grace which I have miserably lost through my own fault. I am sorry for it with my whole heart; I would wish to die of sorrow at the thought of having so often turned my back on Thee. Pardon me through the merits of the painful death which Thou didst suffer for me on the Cross. Bind me with the sweet chains of Thy love, and do not permit me ever more to fly away from Thee. Since I have merited the eternal torments of hell, give me strength to bear with patience all the crosses which Thou sendest me. And since I have deserved to be for eternity under the feet of the devils, make me to embrace with love all the contempt and insults which I shall receive from men. Finally, make me obedient to all Thy holy inspirations, and give me grace to conquer all human respect for the love of Thee. I am resolved henceforward to serve Thee

only : let others say and do what they please, I will serve Thee alone, O my most amiable God ! Thee only do I wish to please. But give me Thy grace without which I can do nothing. I love Thee, O my Jesus, with my whole heart, and I trust in Thy Blood. Mary, my hope, assist me by thy prayers. I glory in being thy servant, and thou dost glory in saving sinners who have recourse to thee. Come to my relief and save me.

Tuesday—First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE SENTENCE OF DEATH.

Who is the man that shall live and not see death? The sentence has been already passed. Fire, water, the sword and the power of princes, says St. Augustine, may be resisted, but *death*—who shall resist it? *It is appointed unto men once to die.*

I.

The Sentence of Death has been written against all men. You are a man, you must therefore die. " Our other good and evil things," says St. Augustine, "are uncertain ; death alone is certain." It is uncertain whether the infant that is just born will be rich or poor ; whether he will have good or bad health ; whether he will die in youth or in old age. But it is certain that he will die. The stroke of death will fall on all the nobles and monarchs of the earth. When death comes there is no earthly power able to resist it. St. Augustine says : " Fire, water, the sword, and the power of princes may be resisted ;

but *death*, who shall resist it?" It is related that at the end of his life a certain king of France said: "Behold, with all my power, I cannot induce death to wait one hour longer for me." When the end of life arrives, it is not delayed a single moment. *Thou hast appointed his bounds, which cannot be passed.*—(Job xiv., 5).

Dearly beloved Christian, though you should live as many years as you expect, a day will come, and on that day an hour, which will be the last hour for you. For me who am now writing, and for you who read this little book, the day and the moment have been decreed when I shall no longer write, and you will no longer read. *Who is the man that shall live and not see death?* —(Ps. lxxxviii., 49). The sentence has been already passed.

Unhappy me, who have spent so many years only in offending Thee, O God of my soul. Behold those years are already past: death is perhaps at hand, and what do I find but pains and remorse of conscience? Oh, that I had always served Thee, my Lord! Fool that I have been! I have lived so many years on this earth, and instead of acquiring merits for Heaven, I have burdened my soul with debts to divine justice. Ah, my dear Redeemer, give me light and strength now to adjust my accounts. Death is perhaps not far off. I wish to prepare for that great moment which will decide my eternal happiness or misery. I thank Thee for having waited for me till now; and since Thou hast given me time to repair the past, do Thou tell me, O my God, what I am to do for Thee. Dost Thou wish me to weep over the offences I have offered to Thee? I am sorry for them and detest them with my whole soul. Dost Thou wish me to spend the remaining years and days of my life in loving Thee? I desire to do so, O God; I have even hitherto frequently resolved to do so; but I have violated my promises. Receive back the traitor that now casts himself with sorrow at Thy feet, that loves Thee and asks Thy mercy.

II.

There never has been a man so foolish as to flatter himself that he will not have to die. What has happened to your forefathers will also happen to you. Of the immense numbers that lived in this country in the beginning of the last Century there is not one now living. Even the princes and monarchs of the earth have changed their country, and of them nothing now remains but a marble mausoleum with a grand inscription which only serves to teach us that of the great ones of this world nothing is left but a little dust inclosed in a tomb. "Tell me," says St. Bernard, "where are the lovers of the world? Of them nothing remains save ashes and worms."

Since our souls will be eternal, we ought to procure not a fortune which soon ends, but one that will be everlasting. What would it profit you to be happy here, were it possible to be happy without God, if hereafter you should be miserable for all eternity? You have built that house to your entire satisfaction, but remember that you must soon leave it to rot in a grave. You have obtained that dignity which raises you above others, but death will come and reduce you to the level of the humblest peasant.

O my Jesus, I will be no longer ungrateful for the great graces Thou hast bestowed upon me. If I do not now change my life, how shall I be able at death to hope for pardon and for Paradise? Behold, I now firmly resolve to begin to serve Thee in earnest. But give me strength; do not abandon me. Thou didst not abandon me when I offended Thee; I therefore hope more confidently for Thy aid now that I purpose to renounce all things to please Thee. Accept me, then, as one of Thy lovers, O God worthy of infinite love! I love Thee, O my Jesus. I love Thee with my whole heart. I love Thee more than myself. Behold, I am Thine; dispose of me, and of all that I possess, as Thou pleasest. Give

me perseverance in obeying Thy commands. Give me Thy love, and then do with me what Thou wilt. Mary, my Mother, my hope, my refuge, to thee I recommend myself; to thee I consign my soul. Pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading.

ACTUAL SINS.

With regard to the sins that men actually commit, we must distinguish between *mortal* and *venial sins.*

1. To understand the nature of *mortal sin*, it is necessary to know that as the soul gives life to the body, so the grace of God gives life to the soul. Hence as the body without the soul is dead, and only fit for the grave, so by sin the soul dies to the grace of God and is doomed to be buried in hell. Hence grievous sin is called *mortal* because it *kills* the soul. *The soul that sinneth, the same shall die.*—(Ezech. xviii., 20). I said that the soul is doomed to hell. But what is this hell? It is a place to which all who die in mortal sin go to suffer eternal torments. *These shall go into everlasting punishment.*—(Matt. xxv., 46). And what pains shall they suffer in hell? Every conceivable pain. There the damned are immersed in a sea of fire, tortured by all sorts of torments, overwhelmed with despair, and abandoned for all eternity.

But is it reasonable, some one will say, that a soul should suffer an eternity of torments for a single mortal sin? He who speaks thus shows that he does not understand what a mortal sin is. Mortal sin is a turning of the back upon God. Thus it is defined by St. Thomas and St. Augustine, as a turning away from the unchangeable Good. Hence God says to the sinner, *Thou hast forsaken me; thou hast gone backward.* —(Jer. xv., 6). Mortal sin is an insult offered to God

by sinners. *I have brought up children and exalted them, but they have despised me.*—(Is. i., 2). It is a dishonour done to the divine Majesty. *By the transgression of the law thou dishonourest God.*—(Rom. ii., 23). It is to say to God : I will not obey Thee ! *Thou hast broken my yoke, . . . and thou saidst, I will not serve.*—(Jer. ii., 20). This is the essence of mortal sin; and for it one hell is not enough : a hundred or a thousand hells would not be sufficient to punish a single mortal sin. If a person unjustly injures a peasant he deserves to be punished. If he does it to a nobleman, a prince, or an emperor, he merits far greater chastisement. But what are all the kings of the earth and even all the Saints of Heaven in comparison with God ? They are as nothing. *All nations are before him as if they had no being at all.*—(Is. xl., 17). Now, I ask, what chastisement is due to one who insults God, and a God Who has died for the love of us ?

However, it must be observed that to make a sin mortal three things are required : *full advertence*, *perfect consent*, and *grievous matter*. If any of these three be wanting, the sin is not mortal. It can be only venial, or perhaps no sin at all.

2. *Venial sin* does not kill the soul, but it wounds it. Venial sin is not a grievous offence, but still it is an offence against God. It is not as great an evil as mortal sin; but it is a greater evil than all the evils that can happen to creatures. A lie, a venial curse, is a greater evil than if all men, all the Saints, and all the Angels were to be sent to hell.

Some venial sins are deliberate, others are indeliberate.

Indeliberate venial sins, or sins committed without full advertence or perfect consent, are less culpable. All men fall into such sins. The Blessed Virgin only had the privilege of being exempt from them.

Deliberate venial sins, which are committed with full advertence and consent, are more criminal, particularly when there is an affection for them; such as certain feelings of hatred, of ambition, certain rooted attachments, and the like. " Who," says St. Basil, " shall dare to call any sin light ?" It is enough to understand

that it offends God, to make us avoid it more than any other evil. The deformity of a venial sin was once shown to St. Catherine of Genoa; she afterwards felt surprised that she did not die of horror at the sight of it. And let him who thinks lightly of venial sin remember, that if he does not amend, he will soon be on the brink of some mortal sin. The more venial sins the soul commits, the weaker she becomes, the greater the power which the devil acquires over her, and the fewer the graces that God bestows upon her. *He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little.* —(Ecclus. xix., 1).

Let us, then, be careful to avoid sin, which alone can make us unhappy in this life and in the next; and let us continually thank the goodness of God for not having already sent us to hell for our sins. Let us henceforth attend to the salvation of our souls, and let us consider how little is all we do for our salvation; how little is all we do for eternal life.

But, to make sure of our eternal salvation, it is not enough *to begin* : it is necessary *to persevere*; and in order to persevere, it is necessary to be humble, always distrusting our own strength, confiding only in God, and continually asking His help to persevere. Woe to the man who trusts in himself and glories in his own good works.

Evening Meditation.

THE MISERY OF A SOUL IN SIN.

I.

Consider the misery of a soul at enmity with God. She is separated from God her Sovereign Good. *Your iniquities*, says the Prophet Isaias, *have divided between you and your God.*—(Is. lix., 2). Hence the soul is no longer God's, and God is no longer hers. *You are not my people and I will not be yours.*—(Osee, i., 9). And

the soul not only belongs no longer to God, but God even hates her and condemns her to hell. God does not hate His creatures. He does not hate wild beasts, the viper or the toad. *Thou lovest all things that are and hatest none of the things which thou hast made.*—(Wis. xi., 25). But He cannot refrain from hating sinners. *Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity.*—(Wis. xi., 25). Yes; God cannot but hate sin, which is diametrically opposed to His will; and in hating sin He must necessarily hate the sinner who is united to his sin. *But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike.*—(Ps. v., 7).

O God! if a man has for his enemy a monarch of the earth, he cannot sleep, he is every moment in dread of death. And how can he who is the enemy of God enjoy peace? He may escape the vengeance of his sovereign by concealing himself or by taking refuge in a distant country. But who can escape the hand of God? *If I ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I descend into hell, thou art present. If I take my wings early in the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there also shall thy hand lead me.*—(Ps. cxxxviii. 8, 10).

Behold, O my Redeemer, the miserable state to which I have brought myself! To make me worthy of Thy grace, Thou didst spend thirty-three years in toil and pains; and I, for the poisoned pleasure of a moment, have despised and lost it. I thank Thy mercy which still gives me time to recover it if I wish. Yes, I wish to do everything in my power to regain it. Tell me what I must do in order to obtain Thy pardon. Dost Thou wish me to repent? O my Jesus! I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thy infinite Goodness. Dost Thou wish me to love Thee? I love Thee above all things. Hitherto I have unfortunately employed my heart in loving creatures and vanities. From this day forward I will live only for Thee. I will love only Thee my God, my Treasure, my Hope, my Strength. *I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.*—(Ps. xvii., 2).

II.

Poor sinners! They are cursed by God, cursed by the Angels, cursed by the Saints, cursed also every day on earth by all Priests and Religious, who, in reciting the Divine Office, proclaim them accursed. *They are cursed who decline from thy commandments.*—(Ps. cxviii., 21). Moreover, that soul that is at enmity with God has lost all its merits. Should a man be equal in merit to St. Paul the Hermit, who lived forty-eight years in a cave; to St. Francis Xavier, who gained ten millions of souls to God; or to St. Paul the Apostle, who, according to St. Jerome, surpassed in merit all the other Apostles,—that man, if he commit a single mortal sin, loses all. *All his justices which he hath done shall not be remembered.*—(Ezech. xviii., 24). Behold the ruin which mortal sin produces: it transforms the child of God into the slave of Lucifer; His beloved friend into an enemy whom He sovereignly hates; and the heir of Heaven into one doomed to hell. St. Francis de Sales used to say that, were the Angels capable of weeping they would shed tears of pity at the sight of a soul that commits mortal sin and loses the divine grace.

But the great misfortune is that the Angels would weep, if it were in their power to do so, and the sinner himself weeps not! "A Christian," says St. Augustine, "if he loses a sheep or any other valuable animal, weeps over the loss, and neither eats nor sleeps; but when he loses the grace of God, he eats and sleeps and sheds not a single tear."

Thy merits, Thy Wounds, O my Jesus, shall be my hope and my strength; from Thee I hope for strength to be faithful to Thee. Give me then, O my Redeemer, the gift of Thy grace, and do not permit me ever again to depart from Thee. Divest my soul of all worldly affections, and inflame my heart with Thy holy love. Mary, my Mother, who wert always on fire with divine love, make me burn like thee with the love of God.

Wednesday—First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

"YESTERDAY FOR ME, TO-DAY FOR THEE."

Who can tell whether it will be either in a year, or within a month, or within a week, or even whether you will be alive to-morrow? "Yesterday for me, to-day for thee." O my Jesus, give me light and pardon me.

I.

It is appointed. It is certain, then, that we are all condemned to death. We are born, says St. Cyprian, with the halter round the neck, and every step we make brings us nearer to death. As your name was one day inserted in the Register of Baptisms, so it shall be one day written in the records of the dead. As in speaking of those who have already departed you say: God be merciful to my father, to my uncle, to my brother,—so others shall say the same of you. As you have heard the death-bell toll for many, so others shall hear it toll for you.

But what would you say if you saw a man on his way to the place of execution, jesting, laughing, gazing about in every direction, and thinking only of comedies, festivities and amusements? And are not you now on your way to death? What are the objects of your thoughts? Behold in that grave your friends and relatives on whom justice has been already executed. How great is the terror and dismay of a man condemned to die, when he beholds his companions hanging dead on the gibbet! Look, then, at these dead bodies. Each

of them says to you : *Yesterday for me; to-day for thee.* —(Ecclus. xxxiii., 23). The same is said to you by the portraits of your deceased relatives, by the memorandum books, the houses, the beds, the garments which they have left. *Yesterday for me! To-day for thee!*

My beloved Redeemer, I would not dare to appear before Thee, did I not see Thee hanging on the Cross lacerated, despised, and lifeless, for the love of me. My ingratitude has been great; but Thy mercy is still greater. My sins have been very grievous; but Thy merits exceed their enormity. Thy Wounds, Thy Blood, and Thy Death, are my hope. I deserve hell by my first sin; to that sin I have added so many other offences. And Thou hast not only preserved my life, but Thou hast also invited me to pardon, and hast offered me peace with so much mercy and so much love. How can I fear that Thou wilt cast me away now that I love Thee and desire nothing but Thy grace? Yes, my dear Lord, I love Thee with my whole heart, and I desire only to love Thee. I love Thee, and am sorry for having despised Thee, not so much because I have deserved hell, as because I have offended Thee, my God, Who hast loved me so tenderly.

II.

To know that you must die—that after death you shall enjoy eternal glory, or suffer eternal torments—that on death depends your eternal happiness or eternal misery—and, with all this before your eyes, not to think of settling your accounts, and of adopting every means of securing a happy death, is surely the extreme of folly. We pity those who meet with a sudden and unprovided death; why, then, do we ourselves not endeavour to be always prepared? We, too, may die suddenly and without preparation. Indeed sooner or later, with or without warning, whether we think or think not of it, we shall die: and every hour, every moment, brings us nearer to our end, which shall be the infirmity that will send us out of this world,

In every age, houses, streets and cities are filled with new people; the former inhabitants have been borne away to the grave. As the days of life have ended for them, so a time will come when neither you nor I, nor anyone alive, shall live any longer on this earth. *Days shall be formed and no one in them.*—(Ps. cxxxviii., 16). We shall all then be in eternity, which shall be for us either an eternal day of delights, or an eternal night of torments. There is no middle way. It is certain and of Faith that one or the other will be our lot.

O my Jesus, open to me the bosom of Thy goodness; add mercies to mercies. Grant that I may be no longer ungrateful to Thee; change my whole heart. Grant that my heart, which once despised Thy love and exchanged it for the miserable delights of this earth, may now be entirely Thine, and may burn with continual flames of love for Thee. I hope to gain Paradise, that I may always love Thee. I cannot enjoy in that kingdom a place among the innocent—I must remain among the penitents; but though among these I wish to love Thee more than the innocent. For the glory of Thy mercy make all Heaven behold so great a sinner inflamed with an ardent love. I resolve henceforth to be all Thine and to think only of loving Thee. Assist me with Thy light and grace to execute this desire, which Thou in Thy goodness hast inspired. O Mary, thou who art the mother of perseverance, obtain for me the grace to be faithful to my promise.

Spiritual Reading.

"*THOU SHALT NOT HAVE STRANGE GODS BEFORE ME.*"—(Exod. xx., 3).

The First Commandment obliges us to give to God due worship and honour. *What* this God is, it is impossible to understand. But let it be enough for us to know that His principal attributes are as follows:

1. God is *Independent*. All things depend on God, but He depends on no one; and, therefore, He possesses all perfections, in regard to which no one can set any bounds to Him.

2. God is *Almighty*. He can do whatever He wishes; by one act of His Will He created the world. He first created the heavens, and the Angels, who are pure spirits, and He created them in the state of grace. But Lucifer, when he was commanded to adore the Son of God, Who was to be made man, through pride refused to obey, and induced a third part of the Angels to join with him in his rebellion against God. These rebellious angels were instantly banished from Heaven by the Archangel Michael, and condemned to hell. They are the devils, who tempt us to sin, in order to make us companions of their torments. Miserable should we be, if we had not God to assist us. We should not have strength to resist their temptations. But God requires, as the condition of giving us this assistance, that in our temptations we instantly turn to Him, and ask His assistance; if we act otherwise, we shall be defeated by our enemies. The Angels who remained faithful were immediately admitted into the enjoyment of the glory of Paradise; and from among these Angels, the Lord has appointed those who were to be our guardians : *He hath given his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.*—(Ps. xc., 11). Let us every day give thanks to our Angel Guardian, and entreat him to assist us always and never abandon us. Next the Lord created the earth and all those things that we see. He then made man, that is, Adam and Eve. So God is the Lord of all things, for He created all things; and as He created all things by one act of His Will, so by another act He can, if He pleases, destroy all things. This is what is meant by God's *Omnipotence*,—that is, God is Almighty.

3. God is also *Most Wise*. He governs all things created without labour or inconvenience. He sees and has before Him all things, past and future, and knows all our thoughts better than they are known to ourselves.

4. God is *Eternal*. He always has been, and always will be and nothing in Him ever had a beginning, or shall have an end.

5. God is *Immense*. He is in Heaven, on earth and in all places.

6. God is *Holy* in all His works, and it is impossible for Him to be in any way evil.

7. God is *Just*. He leaves no sinful act unpunished, and no good act without its reward.

8. God is all *Mercy* to penitent sinners, and all *Love* to the souls that love Him. In a word, God is *Infinite Goodness*; so that He cannot be better or more perfect than He is.

This God, our Creator and Preserver, we are bound to love and honour, principally by acts of the three Theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. "God," says St. Augustine, "is to be worshipped by Faith, Hope, and Charity."

Evening Meditation.

THE SINNER INSULTS GOD.

I.

I have brought up children and exalted them; but they have despised me.—(Is. i., 2).

What does the sinner do when he commits mortal sin? He insults God. The malice of an insult is, St. Thomas says, estimated from the condition of the person who receives the insult and of the person who offers it. It is sinful to offend a peasant; it is more criminal to insult a nobleman; but to treat a monarch with contempt and insolence, is a still greater crime. Who is God? *He is Lord of lords, and King of kings.*—(Apoc. xvii., 14). He is a Being of infinite majesty, before whom all the princes of the earth and all the Saints and Angels are

less than an atom of sand. *As a drop of a bucket . . . as a little dust.*—(Is. xl., 15). And the Prophet Isaias adds, that compared with the greatness of God, all creatures are as insignificant as if they did not exist. *All nations are before him as if they had no being at all.*—(Is. xl., 17). Such is God. And what is man? He is, according to St. Bernard, a heap of worms, the food of worms by which he shall be soon devoured. *He is miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*—(Apoc. iii., 17). Man is a miserable worm that can do nothing: he is so blind that he knows nothing, and so poor and naked that he possesses nothing. And this miserable worm voluntarily insults God! "Vile dust," says the same St. Bernard, "dares to provoke such tremendous majesty." The angelic Doctor, then, had just reason to say that the sin of man contains, as it were infinite malice. And St. Augustine calls sin "an infinite evil." Hence were all men and Angels to offer themselves to death and annihilation, such an offering would not satisfy for a single sin. God punishes sin with the pains of hell; but all Theologians teach that *this chastisement is less than sin deserves.*

And what punishment can be sufficient for a worm who assails his Lord? God is the Lord of all because He has created all. *All things are in thy power . . . Thou hast made heaven and earth and all things.*—(Esth. xiii, 9). All creatures obey God. *The winds and the sea obey him.*—(Matt. viii., 27). *Fire, hail, snow, ice, stormy winds fulfil his word.*—(Ps. cxlviii., 8). But when man sins, what does he do? He says to God: Lord, I will not serve Thee. *Thou hast broken my yoke; thou hast burst my bonds; thou saidst: I will not serve.*—(Jer. ii., 20). The Lord says to him: Seek not revenge; take not that property which belongs to another; abstain from that unchaste gratification. But man answers: I will have revenge; I will take possession of that property; I will indulge in that forbidden pleasure. Like Pharaoh, when Moses, on the part of God, commanded him to allow the people to go into the desert, the sinner answers: *Who is the Lord, that I*

should hear his voice? I know not the Lord.—(Exod. v. 2). The sinner says the same: Lord, I know Thee not, I will do what I please.

Behold, O my God, at Thy feet the rash and daring rebel who has had the temerity and the audacity to insult Thee so often to Thy very face, and to turn his back upon Thee. Thou hast said: *Cry to me, and I will hear.*—(Jer. xxxiii., 3). Hell is too little for me; this I already know. But, remember, O Lord, that I am more sorry for having offended Thee Who art infinite Goodness, than I would be for the loss of all my property and of my very life. Ah, Lord, pardon me, and do not permit me ever to offend Thee again.

II.

In a word, the sinner insults the Lord to His face, and turns his back upon Him. Mortal sin is precisely a turning away from God. Of this the Lord Himself complains. *Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord; thou art gone backward.*—(Jer. xv., 6). You have, says God, been ungrateful to me; you have turned your back upon me; you *are gone backward.* God has declared that He hates sin. Hence He cannot but hate the sinner who commits it. *But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike.*—(Wis. xiv., 9). In committing sin man dares to declare himself the enemy of God, and to contend single-handed with the Lord. *He hath*, says Job, *strengthened himself against the Almighty.*—(Job xv., 25). What would you say if you saw an insect attack an armed soldier? God is the Omnipotent Being Who by a nod has created Heaven and earth *out of nothing.*—(Mach. vii., 28). And if He wished, He could by another act of His will, destroy all creatures. *The Almighty Lord, who, at a beck, can utterly destroy . . . the whole world.*—(Ibid. viii., 18). In consenting to sin, the sinner stretches out his arm against the Lord. *He hath*, says Job, *stretched out his hand against God. He hath run against him with his neck raised up, and is armed with a fat neck.*—(Job xv., 25). He raises his neck, that is, he swells with pride, and runs

to insult God; he arms himself with a fat neck, that is, with ignorance; for a fat neck is the symbol of ignorance—of that ignorance which makes the sinner say, *What harm have I done? What great evil is that sin which I have committed? God is merciful. He pardons sinners.* What an insult to God! What temerity! What blindness!

Thou hast waited for me, O my God, that I may repent and forever bless Thy mercy and love Thee. Yes, I repent, I bless Thee, I love Thee and I hope, through the merits of Jesus Christ, that I shall never again be separated from Thy love. Thy love has rescued me from hell; it is by Thy love that I am to be preserved from sin for the future. I thank Thee, my Lord, for the light and the desire Thou givest me to love Thee forever. Ah, take possession of my whole being—of my soul and body—of my powers and senses —of my will and liberty. I am Thine—save me. Thou art my only Good; Thou art alone amiable: mayest Thou also be my only Love. Give me fervour in loving Thee. I have offended Thee grievously. Hence it is not enough for me to love Thee. I wish to love Thee ardently in order to compensate for the injuries I have done Thee. From Thee Who art omnipotent I hope for this love. I also hope for it, O Mary, through thy prayers which are powerful with God.

Thursday—First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

MEMENTO MORI! REMEMBER DEATH!

Oh, how correctly men estimate things, and how well directed their actions whose judgments are formed and whose conduct is regulated in view of death! "Consider the end of life," says St. Laurence Justinian, "and you will love nothing in this world."

I.

Death is certain. But, O God, this truth Christians know, this they believe and see; and how can they still live so forgetful of death as if they would never have to die? If after this life there were neither hell nor Heaven, could they think less of it than they do at present? It is this forgetfulness that makes them lead so wicked a life. If you wish to live well, spend the remaining days of life with death before your eyes. *O death, thy sentence is welcome.*—(Ecclus. xli., 3). Oh, how correctly do men estimate things, and how well directed their actions whose judgments are formed and whose conduct is regulated in view of death! "Consider the end of life," says St. Laurence Justinian, "and you will love nothing in this world." *All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life.*—(1 John, ii., 16). All the goods of this earth are reduced to the pleasures of sense, to riches and honours. But all these are readily despised by the man who considers that after being the food of worms in the grave, he will soon be reduced to dust.

And in reality it was in view of death that the Saints despised all the goods of this earth. St. Charles Borromeo kept on his table a skull in order that he might continually contemplate it. Cardinal Baronius had inscribed on his ring the words, *Memento Mori! Remember Death!* The Venerable Father Juvenal Ancina, Bishop of Saluzzo, had this motto written on a skull, "What you are, I was; and what I am, you shall be." A holy hermit being asked when dying how he could be so cheerful, said: "I have always kept death before my eyes; and therefore, now that it has arrived, I see nothing new in it."

Then, at death, all shall be at an end for me! I shall then find only the little I have done for Thee, O my God, and what do I wait for! Do I wait till death comes and finds me as miserable and defiled with sin as I am at present? Were I now called to eternity I

should die with great disquietude on account of my past sins. No, my Jesus, I will not die in so sad a state. I thank Thee for having given me time to weep over my iniquities and to love Thee. I wish to begin from this moment. I am sorry from the bottom of my heart for having offended Thee, O Sovereign Good, and I love Thee above all things—I love Thee more than my life.

II.

What folly would it not be for a traveller to think only of acquiring dignities and possessions in the countries through which he had to pass, and thus reduce himself to the necessity of living miserably in his native land where he must remain during his whole life! And is not he a fool who seeks after happiness in this world where he spends only a few days, and exposes himself to the risk of being unhappy in the next where he must spend his eternity? We do not fix our affections on borrowed goods, because we know that they must soon be returned to the owner. All the goods of this earth are lent to us: it is folly to set our heart on what we must soon give up. Death shall strip us of them all. The acquisitions and fortunes of this world all terminate in a dying gasp, a funeral and a lowering into the grave. The house which you have built for yourself you must soon give up to others. The grave will be the dwelling of your body till the Day of Judgment; thence it will go to Heaven or to hell, wheresoever the soul will have already gone.

Oh, my Jesus, I give myself entirely to Thee. From this moment I embrace and unite Thee to my heart. I now consign my soul to Thee. *Into thy hands I commend my spirit.* I will not wait to give it to Thee when that *Profisiscere*, "Depart, O soul," will anounce my departure from this world. I will not wait till then to ask Thee to save me. "Jesu, sis mihi Jesus." My Saviour, save me now by granting me pardon and the grace of Thy holy love. Who knows but this consideration I am making may be the last call Thou wilt give me, and the last mercy Thou wilt show me? Extend

Thy hand, O my Love, and deliver me from the mire of my tepidity. Give me fervour and make me do with great love all that Thou dost demand of me. Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ, give me holy perseverance, and the grace to love Thee, and to love Thee ardently during the remainder of my life. O Mary, through the love which thou bearest to thy Jesus, obtain for me these two graces—perseverance and love.

Spiritual Reading.

FAITH.

Faith is a virtue, or a gift that God infuses into our souls in Baptism; a gift by which we believe the Truths God Himself has revealed to the Holy Church, and which she proposes to our belief.

By the *Church* is meant the congregation of all who are *baptized* (for persons *not baptized* are out of the Church), and profess the true Faith under a visible Head, that is, the Sovereign Pontiff. I say the *true Faith*, to exclude heretics, who, though baptized, are separated from the Church! I say *under a visible head*, to exclude schismatics who do not obey the Pope, and on that account, easily pass from schism to heresy. St. Cyprian well says: "Heresies and schisms have no other origin than this—the refusal to obey the Priest of God and the notion that there can be more than one Priest at one time presiding over the Church, and more than one Judge at a time filling the office of Vicar of Christ."

We have all revealed Truths in the Sacred Scriptures, and in the Traditions gradually communicated by God to His servants. But how should we be able to ascertain what are the *true Traditions* and the *true Scriptures*, and what is their *true meaning*, if we had not the Church to teach us? This Church Jesus Christ established as *the pillar and the ground of the truth.*

—(1 Tim. iii., 15). To this Church our Saviour Himself has promised that she shall never be conquered by her enemies. *The gates of hell shall not prevail against her.*—(Matt. xvi., 18). The gates of hell are the heresies and heresiarchs that have caused so many miserable, deluded souls to wander from the right way. This Church it is that teaches us, through her ministers, the truths that we are to believe. Thus, St. Augustine says: "I would not believe the Gospel, were I not moved by the authority of the Church."

THE MOTIVE OF FAITH, AND HOW WE SHOULD MAKE AN ACT OF FAITH.

The cause or motive, then, which imposes on me the obligation to believe the Truths of Faith is, because God, the infallible Truth, has revealed them, and because the Church proposes them to my belief. So we should make an Act of Faith in this way: "O my God, because Thou, Who art the infallible Truth, hast revealed to the Church the Truths of Faith, I believe all the Church proposes to my belief."

This is the reason or motive which makes me believe the Truths of revelation. Let us now see what are those Truths which we are obliged to believe.

THE PRINCIPAL ARTICLES OF FAITH.

There are four principal Articles of Faith:

1. There is an ever-present God.

2. He is a Rewarder Who rewards with the eternal glory of Paradise all who observe His law, and punishes all who transgress it with the everlasting torments of hell.

3. In God there are Three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these Persons, though distinct from one another, are but One God, because They are one Essence and one Divinity. Hence, as the Father is Eternal, Omnipotent, Infinite, so are the Son and the Holy Ghost equally Eternal, Omnipotent, and Infinite. The Son is begotten of the Intelligence of the

Father. The Holy Ghost proceeds from the Will of the Father and the Son, by the Love with which They love each other.

4. The Incarnation of the Eternal Word—that is, of the Second Person—the Son, Who, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, was made man in the womb of the Virgin Mary—for the Person of the Word assumed the nature of man, so that the two natures, the Divine and the human, were united in the Person of Jesus Christ, Who suffered and died for our salvation. But what necessity was there that Jesus Christ should suffer for our redemption? Man had sinned; and to obtain pardon it was necessary that man should make a full satisfaction to God for the sins that had been committed. But how could man make such satisfaction to the infinite majesty of God? What, then, did God do? The Father sent the Son to take upon Himself our nature: and the Son, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, atoned to the divine justice on behalf of man. Such is the debt and the love that we owe to Jesus Christ. Denis the Carthusian tells us of a young man who, at Mass, did not kneel down at the words of the Creed, *Et homo factus est*; upon which a devil with a club appeared to him, and said: "Thou ungrateful wretch, dost thou not thank the God Who was made flesh for thee? If He had done for us what He has done for thee, we should be always prostrate in thankful adoration. And thou dost not even make a sign of thankfulness." Then he gave him a terrible blow with his club and left him half dead.

Evening Meditation.

HE THAT LOVES GOD MUST LOVE, NOT ABHOR, DEATH.

How can he abhor death who is in the grace of God? *He that abideth in love dwelleth in God and God in him.*—(1 John, iv., 16). He, therefore, that loves God

is secure of His grace, and dying thus he is sure of going to rejoice forever in the kingdom of the Blessed; and shall such a one fear death? David truly said: *Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight no man living shall be justified.*—(Ps. cxlii. 2). This means that no man may presume to be saved by his own merits; for no one but Jesus and Mary can say that he has been without sin through life. Yet he ought not to fear death, if, with true repentance for his sins, he trusts in the merits of Jesus Christ Who came on earth to save sinners. *The Son of man came to save that which was lost.*—(Matt. xviii., 11). And for this end He died, and poured forth His Blood to save sinners. The Blood of Christ Jesus, says the Apostle, speaks better in favour of sinners than the blood of Abel spoke against Cain who slew him.—(Heb. xii., 22).

It is true that, without a divine revelation, no man can possess an infallible certainty of his own salvation; but he that has given himself with a true heart to God, and is ready to lose everything, even life itself, rather than lose the divine grace, has a moral certainty that he will be saved. This certainty is founded on the divine promises. No man, says the Scripture, ever trusted in God and was confounded. Almighty God declares in many passages that He does not desire the death of the sinner but that he be converted and live. *Is it my will that a sinner should die, saith the Lord God, and not that he should be converted from his ways and live?*—(Ezech. xviii., 23). In another place He makes the same declaration and adds an oath: *As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.*—(Ezech. xxxiii., 11). And God laments over those obstinate sinners who choose to perish because they will not leave their sins, and He says: *Why will you die, O house of Israel?* And to those who repent of their sins He promises to forget all their iniquities. *If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed he shall live. . . . I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done.*—(Ezech. xviii., 21).

O my beloved Jesus and my Judge, when Thou dost judge me, for Thy mercy condemn me not to hell! In hell I could not love Thee, but should hate Thee forever; and how can I hate Thee Who art so worthy of love, and Who hast loved me? If Thou wilt condemn me to hell, at least grant me grace to be able to love Thee there with all my heart. This grace to love Thee I do not deserve through my sins, but if I do not deserve it, Thou hast purchased it for me with the Blood Thou didst shed with such anguish for me upon the Cross.

II.

When a sinner also hates the sins he has committed, it is a certain sign that he has been pardoned. A holy Father says that whoever can say, with truth: *I hate and abhor my iniquities* (Ps. cxviii., 163), may be certain that they are forgiven. We have another sign of pardon when we recover grace and persevere in a good life for a considerable time after having sinned. It it also a sure sign to the same effect when we have a fixed resolution to die rather than lose the friendship of God, as also when we earnestly desire to love Him, and to see Him loved by others, and when we feel distress at seeing Him offended.

How is it then, that certain great Saints after having given themselves wholly to God, and after a life of mortification and detachment from all earthly things, at the hour of death have felt great terror at the thought of appearing before Christ their judge? I reply that those great Saints who suffered these fears at the moment of death were very few, and that it was the will of God that they should thus purge away the remains of their sins before entering into eternal blessedness; but that generally speaking, all the Saints have died in remarkable peace, and with an earnest desire to depart to the presence of God. And besides, this is the difference between sinners and Saints at the hour of death: sinners pass from fear to despair, Saints from fear to confidence, and thus die in peace.

Therefore, every one who has a hope that he is in the grace of God ought to desire death, repeating the prayer which Christ has taught us : *Thy kingdom come!* And he ought to embrace death with joy when it comes that he may thus be freed from sin, and leave this world where no one lives without imperfections, and go to behold God, face to face, and love Him with all his powers in the kingdom of love.

O my Judge, inflict on me every pain, but deprive me not of the power of loving Thee. O Mother of God, behold the peril in which I stand of being condemned to be unable to love thy Son Who deserves an infinite love! Help me; have pity on me. St. Joseph, my Protector, obtain for me a holy death. My Guardian Angel, St. Michael the Archangel, defend me from the evil one in the last conflict. My holy Patrons and all ye Saints in Paradise, succour me in that last hour. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, be with me in the hour of my death.

Friday—First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

"FOR WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?"

Worldlings esteem happy only those who enjoy the pleasures, the riches and the pomps of this earth. But death puts an end to all these earthly goods. *For what is your life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a little while.* O my Jesus, how often, for the miserable pleasures and goods of this earth, have I offended and lost Thee Who art an Infinite Good!

I.

For what is your life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a little while.—(James iv., 15). The vapours exhaled from the earth, when raised in the air and clothed in the light of the sun, make a splendid appearance, but how long does this splendour last? It vanishes before the first blast of wind. Behold that nobleman: to-day flattered and feared and almost adored; to-morrow dead, despised, reviled and trampled upon. At death we must leave all things. The brother of that great servant of God, Thomas à Kempis, took delight in speaking of a beautiful house which he had built for himself: a friend told him that it had one great defect. "What is it?" he asked. "It is," answered the other, "that you have made a door in it." "What!" rejoined the brother of à Kempis, "is a door a defect?" "Yes," answered the friend; "for through this door you must one day be carried dead and must leave house and all."

Death in a word, strips man of all this world's goods. Oh, what a spectacle to behold a prince banished from his palace, never more to return to it; and to see others take possession of his furniture, his money, and all his other goods! The servants leave him in the grave with a garment scarcely sufficient to cover his body. There is no longer any one to esteem or flatter him, no longer any one to attend to his commands. Saladin, who had acquired many kingdoms in Asia, gave directions at death, that when his body should be carried to the place of burial a person should go before, holding a winding-sheet suspended from a pole and crying aloud: "This is all that Saladin brings with him to the grave."

My Lord, since Thou givest me light to know that whatever the world esteems is smoke and folly grant me strength to detach my heart from earthly goods before death separates me from them. Miserable that I have been! How often for the miserable pleasures and goods of this earth, have I offended and lost Thee, Who art an Infinite Good! O Jesus, my heavenly Physician,

cast Thine eyes upon my poor soul, look at the many wounds which I have inflicted on it by my sins, and have pity on me. *If thou wishest thou canst make me clean.*—(Matt. viii., 2). I know that Thou art able and willing to heal me; but in order to heal me, Thou wishest me to repent of the injuries which I have committed against Thee. I am sorry for them from the bottom of my heart. Heal me, then, now that it is in Thy power to heal me. *Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee.*—(Ps. xl., 5).

II.

When the body of the prince is laid in the grave, his flesh drops off, and behold, his skeleton can no longer be distinguished from others. "Contemplate," says St. Basil, "the sepulchres of the dead, and see if you can distinguish who has been a servant, and who has been a master." Diogenes was one day seen by Alexander the Great seeking with great anxiety for something among the bones of the dead. Alexander asked him what he was in search of. "I am looking," replied Diogenes, "for the head of Philip your father. I am not able to distinguish it. If you can find it, show it to me." "Men," says Seneca, "are born unequal; but after death all are equal." And Horace says that death brings down the sceptre to the level of the spade —Sceptra ligonibus æquat. In a word, when death comes, *the end comes*; all ends, we leave all things; and of all we possess in this world, we bring nothing to the grave.

I have forgotten Thee, O Lord, but Thou hast not forgotten me; and now Thou makest me feel that Thou wilt even forget the injuries I have done Thee, if I detest them. *But if the wicked do penance . . . I will not remember all his iniquities.*—(Ezech. xviii., 21). Behold, I detest my sins, I hate them above all things. Forget, then, O my Redeemer, all the displeasure I have given Thee. For the future I will forfeit all things, even life, rather than forfeit Thy grace. And what can all the goods of this earth profit me without Thy grace?

Ah, assist me! Thou knowest my weakness. Hell will not cease to tempt me: it already prepares a thousand attacks to make me again its slave. No, my Jesus, do not abandon me. I wish to be henceforth the slave of Thy love. Thou art my only Lord; Thou hast created and redeemed me; Thou hast loved me more than all others; Thou alone hast merited my love; Thee alone do I wish to love.

Spiritual Reading.

THE THINGS THAT WE MUST KNOW AND BELIEVE—

SOME NECESSARY BY NECESSITY OF MEANS, AND OTHERS BY NECESSITY OF PRECEPT.

There are some Articles to be believed by *necessity of means* without which we cannot obtain salvation; others by *necessity of precept*. The necessity of *means* implies that if we do not believe certain Articles of Faith, we cannot be saved. The necessity of *precept* signifies that we must believe certain other Articles proposed to us by the Church, but if it happens that we are ignorant of them by invincible ignorance, we are excused from sin and may be saved.

1. To know and believe that there is a God, and that He is a just rewarder of virtue and punisher of vice, is certainly necessary as a *means of salvation*, according to the words of the Apostle, *For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and is a rewarder to them that seek him.*—(Heb. xi., 6). Some authors hold that belief in the other two Articles—the *Trinity of Persons* and the *Incarnation of the Word*—is necessary by *necessity of precept*, but not necessary as a *means of salvation*, so that a person inculpably ignorant of them may be saved. At any rate it is certain, as Innocent

XI. declared (when condemning a contrary proposition), that he who is ignorant of the two Mysteries of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ cannot receive absolution.

2. We are obliged only by necessity of *pr cept* (which, however, binds under grievous sin), to know and believe the other Articles of the Creed, at least the principal Articles among them—such as that God has created Heaven and earth; that He preserves and governs the universe; that the Blessed Virgin Mary is the true Mother of God and is ever a Virgin; that on the third day after His death Jesus Christ rose from the dead by His own power; that He ascended into Heaven and there sits on the right hand of His Eternal Father. By this it is meant that Jesus Christ, even as Man, sits at the right hand of God—that is, that He permanently possesses a glory equal to that of the Father, as Bellarmine explains. I said *even as Man*. For as God, Jesus Christ is in all things equal to the Father. As Man, He is, indeed, inferior to the Father, but because our Saviour is at the same time both *God* and *Man*, and only one Person, therefore the Humanity of Jesus Christ in Heaven has a glory and majesty equal to that of the Father, not by its own dignity, but because it is united with the Person of the Son of God. When a king sits on his throne, the regal purple that he wears is there with him; thus the Humanity of Christ by itself is not equal to God, but because it is united with a divine Person, it is seated on the same throne with God, with a glory equal to that of God.

We are also bound to know and believe that, on the last day of the world all men shall rise, and shall be judged by Jesus Christ. We must also believe that the *Roman Catholic Church* is the *only true Church*. Hence they who are out of our Church, or separated from it, cannot be saved, except infants who die after Baptism. We are obliged to believe in the Communion of Saints—that is, that each of the faithful in the state of grace partakes of the merits of all the Saints living and dead. We must also believe in the remission of

sins—that is, that our sins are remitted in the Sacrament of Penance, provided we are sincerely penitent for them. Lastly, we must believe in Eternal life—that is, that he who is saved by dying in a state of grace will go to Heaven, where he will enjoy God for all eternity; and that he who dies in sin will be sent to hell, where he will be tormented for all eternity.

Moreover, every Christian is obliged to know the Precepts of the Decalogue and those of the Church, and the principal obligations of his own state of life, whether he be an ecclesiastic or secular, married or single, a lawyer, doctor, etc.

Every one is bound also to know and believe in the Seven Sacraments and their effects, particularly the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, and Eucharist, and the other Sacraments when he is about to receive them.

All are obliged to know the *Our Father*. The "Our Father," or Lord's Prayer, is a prayer that Jesus Christ Himself composed, and left to us that we may know in what manner to ask the graces most necessary for our salvation. St. Hugh, Bishop of Grenoble, on one occasion when he was ill, repeated the *Our Father* three hundred times in one night. His attendant advised him not to repeat it so often, for fear of increasing his illness. The Saint answered that the oftener he said it, the faster he recovered. It is particularly useful to repeat over and over again the words, *Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven*; for the greatest grace that God can bestow upon us is to make us do His holy will here on earth. It is also very profitable to repeat the petition, *and lead us not into temptation*, begging the Lord to deliver us from the temptations in which He foresees that we should fall.

Moreover, every one should learn the *Hail Mary*, in order to know how to recommend ourselves to the Mother of God through whom, as St. Bernard says, we receive all the graces God gives us.

All should likewise know that there exists a Purgatory, a place for expiating sins after death, where the Faithful

suffer for their sins those temporal punishments that they did not fully undergo in this life. We should, therefore, be mindful to pray and offer our suffrages for the Holy Souls in Purgatory whom we are, as far as we can, bound to relieve in their sufferings. Indeed the least pain in Purgatory is greater than all the pains of this life put together, for the pains of these spouses of Christ are most intense, and these Poor Souls are unable to assist themselves. If on this earth, our neighbour were suffering great pain, and we could relieve him without any great inconvenience, should we not be obliged to do so? We are equally bound to render assistance to these Holy Souls, at least by our prayers.

We should also know that it is very useful to us to obtain the intercession of the Saints, and particularly of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is of Faith, as the Council of Trent has declared against the impious Calvin who said it was wrong to ask the assistance of the Saints. Nay, according to the doctrine of St. Thomas, we mortals are absolutely bound to go to the Saints in order to obtain, through their intercession, the divine graces necessary for our salvation; not because God cannot save us without the intercession of the Saints, but because the order established by God requires that while we remain in this life we should be brought back to Him by the mediation and prayers of the Saints. This doctrine is also held by other Theologians. We should likewise venerate the Relics of the Saints, the Cross, and Sacred Images.

Evening Meditation.

JESUS SATISFIES FOR OUR SINS.

Blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us which was contrary to us. And he hath taken the same out of the way fastening it to the cross. —(Coloss. ii., 14).

The sentence was already recorded against us that was to condemn us to eternal death, as rebels against

the offended Majesty of God. And what did Jesus Christ do? With His Blood He cancelled the writing of the condemnation, and, to deliver us from all fear, He fastened it to His own Cross on which He died to satisfy divine Justice for us. My soul, behold the obligation thou art under to thy Redeemer; and hear how the Holy Spirit now reminds thee: *Forget not the kindness of thy surety.*—(Ecclus. xxix., 20). Forget not the kindness of thy Surety, Who, taking upon Himself thy debts, hath paid them for thee; and behold, the pledge of the payment has been already fixed to the Cross. When, therefore, thou dost remember thy sins, look upon the Cross and have confidence. Look on that sacred wood red with the Blood of the Lamb of God sacrificed for thy love, and hope in and love a God Who hath loved thee so much.

Yes, my Jesus, I hope for everything from Thy infinite goodness. It is of Thy divine nature to render good for evil to those who repent of their sins, who are sorry for having committed them, and love Thee. Yes, I am sorry above all things, my beloved Redeemer, for having despised Thy goodness so much, and, wounded by Thy love, I love Thee and I ardently desire to please Thee in everything that is Thy will. Alas! when I was in sin, I was the servant of the devil and he was my master. Now that I hope to remain in Thy grace, Thou alone, my Jesus, art the only Lord of my heart and my only Love. Take possession of me, then, and keep me always, possess me entirely, for Thine only do I desire to be. Nevermore will I forget the pains Thou hast suffered for me, so that I shall be more and more inflamed with Thy love. I love Thee, my most dear Redeemer; I love Thee, O Word Incarnate, my Treasure, my All. I love Thee! I love Thee!

II.

But if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Just, and he is the propitiation for our sins.—(1 Jo. ii., 1).

Oh, what great confidence do these words give to penitent sinners! Jesus Christ is in Heaven, advocating their cause, and He is certain to obtain pardon for them. The devil, when a sinner has escaped from his chains, tempts him to be diffident of obtaining pardon. But St. Paul encourages him, saying, *Who is he that shall condemn? Jesus Christ that died, . . . who also maketh intercession for us.*—(Rom. viii., 34). The Apostle means to say, that if we detest the sins we have committed, we should not fear. Who is He that will condemn us? Jesus Christ, the same Who died that we might *not* be condemned, and Who is now in Heaven advocating our cause. He goes on to say: *Who, then, shall separate us from the love of Christ?*—(Rom. viii., 35). As if he would say: But, after we have been pardoned with so much love by Jesus Christ, and have been received into His grace, who could have the heart to turn his back upon Him and separate himself from His love?

No, my Jesus, I no longer rely upon myself so as to live separated from Thee and deprived of Thy love. I weep over the unhappy days when I lived without Thy grace. Now I hope that Thou hast pardoned me. I love Thee and Thou lovest me. But Thou dost love me with a boundless love, and I love Thee so little. Give me more love. Infinite Goodness, I repent above all things for having hitherto so ill-treated Thee; now I love Thee above all things; I love Thee more than myself; and I delight more in knowing Thou art infinitely blessed, than in my own happiness, because Thou art worthy of infinite love. I deserve nothing but hell. My Jesus, I wish for nothing from Thee but Thyself.

Saturday—First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

MARY'S FAITH.

St. Leo applies to our Blessed Lady the words of Proverbs : *Her lamp shall not be put out in the night.* When the Disciples doubted, she did not doubt. She saw Jesus weep and believed Him the Joy of Paradise. She saw Him in death, despised and crucified, and although Faith wavered in others, Mary remained firm in the belief that He was God. O Virgin Mary, increase our Faith !

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I.

As the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of holy Love and Hope, so also is she the Mother of Faith : *I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope.*—(Ecclus. xxiv., 24). And with reason is she so, says St. Ireneus, for " the evil done by Eve's incredulity was remedied by Mary's Faith." This is confirmed by Tertullian who says that because Eve, contrary to the assurance that she had received from God, believed the serpent, she brought death into the world; but our Queen, because she believed the Angel when he said that she, remaining a virgin, would become the Mother of God, brought salvation into the world. For St. Augustine says that " when Mary consented to the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, by means of her Faith she opened Heaven to men." Richard of St. Laurence, on the words of St. Paul, *for*

the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife—(Cor. vii., 14), says that "Mary is the believing woman by whose Faith the unbelieving Adam and all his posterity have been saved." Hence on account of her Faith, Elizabeth called the holy Virgin blessed: *Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished in thee that were spoken by the Lord.*—(Luke i., 45). And St. Augustine adds, that Mary was more blessed in receiving the Faith of Christ than in conceiving the Flesh of Christ.

Father Suarez says that the most holy Virgin had more Faith than all men and Angels. She saw her Son in the Crib of Bethlehem, and believed Him the Creator of the world. She saw Him fly from Herod, and yet believed Him the King of kings. She saw Him born and believed Him Eternal. She saw Him poor and in need of food, and believed Him the Lord of the universe. She saw Him lying on straw, and believed Him Omnipotent. She observed that He did not speak, and she believed Him Infinite Wisdom. She heard Him weep, and believed Him the Joy of Paradise. In fine, she saw Him in death, despised and crucified, and, although Faith wavered in others, Mary remained firm in the belief that He was God.

On these words of the Gospel, *there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother*—(Jo. xix., 25), St. Antoninus says: "Mary stood supported by her Faith which she retained firm in the Divinity of Christ." And for this reason it is, the Saint adds, that in the office of *Tenebræ* only one candle is left lighted. St. Leo, on this subject, applies to our Blessed Lady the words of Proverbs, *Her lamp shall not be put out in the night.*—(Prov. xxxi., 18).

Therefore Mary merited by her great Faith to become "the light of all the faithful," as St. Methodius calls her, and the "Queen of the true Faith," as she is called by St. Cyril of Alexandria. The Holy Church herself attributes to the merits of Mary's Faith the destruction of all heresies: "Rejoice, O Virgin Mary, for thou alone hast destroyed all heresies throughout the world."

II.

St. Ildephonsus exhorts us to imitate Mary's Faith. But how can we do so? Faith at the same time that it is *a gift*, is also *a virtue*. It is *a gift* of God inasmuch as it is a light infused by Him into our souls; and *a virtue*, inasmuch as the soul has to exercise itself in the practice of it. Hence Faith is not only to be the rule of our belief, but also that of our actions; therefore St. Gregory says "he truly believes who puts what he believes into practice;" and St. Augustine, "Thou sayest, I believe; do what thou sayest, and that is Faith." To have a lively Faith is to live according to our belief: *My just man liveth by faith.*—(Heb. x., 38). Thus did the Blessed Virgin live very differently from those who do not live in accordance with what they believe, and whose Faith is dead, as St. James declares, *Faith without works is dead.*—(James ii., 26).

Diogenes sought for a man on earth; but God, amongst the many faithful, seems to seek for a Christian, for few there are who have good works. The greater number have only the name of Christian. To such as these should be applied the words once addressed by Alexander the Great to a cowardly soldier who was also named Alexander: "Either change thy *name* or change thy *conduct*." But as Blessed John of Avila used to say, "It would be better to shut up these poor creatures as madmen who believe that an eternity of happiness is prepared for those who lead good lives, and an eternity of misery for those who lead bad lives, and yet live as if they believed nothing." St. Augustine therefore exhorts us to see things with the eyes of Christians, that is to say, with eyes which look at all things in the light of Faith; for, as St. Teresa often said, all sins come from a want of Faith. Let us therefore entreat the most holy Virgin, by the merit of her Faith to obtain us a lively Faith. "O Lady, increase our Faith."

Spiritual Reading.

PROOFS OF THE TRUTH OF OUR FAITH.

Before I proceed farther, I will answer an objection which may be made. It is asserted that the truth of our Faith is clear and evident: but how can it be clear when there are so many Mysteries, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation of the Word, and the Eucharist, which are obscure and incomprehensible?

I answer, the *Mysteries* of the Faith are obscure, but not the *truth* of the Faith. That our Faith is *true*, is evident by the plainest and most irrefragable arguments. The Mysteries of Faith are obscure to us, and God Himself wishes them to be obscure. First, because He wishes to be honoured by our believing, though we cannot comprehend, all the truths that He has revealed; and, secondly, because we acquire merit by believing what we do not see. What merit should a man have for believing something because he sees and comprehends it? St. Gregory says that Faith has no merit if human reason furnishes a proof for it. But if we are unable to comprehend the material things of this world—for who is there that comprehends how the magnet attracts iron? how a single grain of corn, sown in the earth, produces a thousand other grains? Who comprehends the action of the moon, or that of lightning?—what wonder is there if we cannot comprehend the Mysteries of God?

The *objects*, then, of our Faith are obscure; but the *truth* of our Faith is established by so many evident proofs, that he who does not embrace it can only be called a fool. These proofs are numerous. We shall mention only three of them:

1. The first is taken from the Prophecies written in the Holy Bible so many ages before the event and afterwards exactly fulfilled. Long before it happened, the Death of Our Redeemer was foretold by several Prophets.

David, Daniel, Aggeus and Malachy foretold the time and circumstances of His Death. It was foretold that in punishment of the murder of Jesus Christ by the Jews, their temple should be destroyed, and they should be driven from their country; that they should remain blinded in their sin, and should be scattered over the whole earth. We know that all this has taken place. It was also foretold that after the death of the Messias, the world should be converted from idolatry to the worship of the true God—and this was done by the holy Apostles, who, unaided by learning, nobility, riches, or the protection of the great, and even in spite of the opposition of the potentates of the earth, recalled the world to the worship of the true God and induced men to forsake their gods and their inveterate habits of vice, in order to embrace a Faith that taught them to believe so many Mysteries they could not comprehend, and imposed on them so many Precepts hard to be observed, because so contrary to corrupt nature; such as, to love our enemies, to abstain from pleasures, to bear insults, and to place all our affections, not in the goods that we see, but in the goods of a future life that we do not see.

2. We have further evident proofs of our Faith in the multitude of miracles wrought by Jesus Christ, by the Apostles and other Saints, in the presence of the very enemies of the Faith, who, when they could not deny the prodigies, said that they were performed by diabolical agency. But true miracles that surpass the power of nature, such as the raising of the dead to life, giving sight to the blind, and the like, cannot be wrought by devils. They have no power to work such miracles. God cannot permit a miracle except in confirmation of the true Faith. Should He permit a miracle in confirmation of error, He Himself would deceive us. Therefore, the true miracles that we witness in the Catholic Church are infallible proofs of the Truth of our Faith.

3. The constancy of the Martyrs is again a very strong argument in favour of our Faith. In the first ages of the Church, in the reign of the tyrants, there were many millions of persons, and among them many tender virgins

and children, who, rather than deny the Faith of Jesus Christ, endured with joy torments and death. Sulpitius Severus writes that, in the time of Diocletian, the Martyrs presented themselves to their judges with a desire of Martyrdom that surpassed the avidity with which men pursue the riches and honours of the world.

The Martyrdom of St. Mauritius, and the whole Theban Legion, is one famous in history. The Emperor Maximian commanded all his soldiers to assist at an impious sacrifice he was going to offer to his false deities. St. Mauritius and his soldiers, because they were all Christians, refused to obey the order of the Emperor. Having heard of their refusal, Maximian, to punish their disobedience, ordered them to be decimated—that is, the head of every tenth man in the legion to be cut off. Each of them desired to die; and the soldiers who were spared envied the happiness of those who were put to death for Jesus Christ. As soon as this was made known to Maximian, he ordered them to be decimated a second time; but this only increased their desire of Martyrdom. In the end the tyrant ordered them all to be beheaded; and all with joy in their faces, laid down their arms, and, like so many meek lambs, gladly and without resistance submitted to death.

Prudentius relates that a child seven years old, whose name is unrecorded, was tempted by Asclepiades to deny the Faith of Christ; but when the boy refused, saying that he had been taught this Faith by his mother, the tyrant sent for her, and in her presence caused the child to be scourged till his whole body became one wound. All the spectators shed tears of pity; but the mother exulted with joy at the sight of the fortitude of her son. Before death, the child being thirsty, asked his mother for a little water. "Son," said the mother, "have patience a little while; you shall soon be satiated in Heaven with every delight." The prefect, enraged at the constancy of the mother and the son, commanded his head to be cut off instantly. After the execution of the order, the mother took the dead child in her arms, and kissed him with feelings of the most joyful triumph because he had laid down his life for Jesus Christ.

From all that we have said, we ought to gather that we are bound to return God the most heartfelt thanks for having given us the gift of the true Faith. How great is the number of infidels, heretics, and schismatics! Catholics do not amount to a tenth of the human race, and God has placed us in this number. By His Providence we are born in the bosom of the true Church. Few thank God for this great benefit. Let us, at least, be careful to thank Him for it every day.

Evening Meditation.

THE PATIENCE OF GOD WITH SINNERS.

I.

The more we have experienced the patient mercies of God, the more we ought to be afraid of continuing to abuse them, lest the hour of God's vengeance overtake us. *Revenge is mine, and I will repay in due time.* —(Deut. xxxii., 35). God's forbearance will cease towards those who cease not to abuse it.

I give Thee thanks, O Lord, for having patiently borne with me though I have so often betrayed Thee. Make me sensible of the evil that I have done in abusing Thy patience for so long a time. Make me sorry for all the offences I have committed against Thee. No, I will never more abuse Thy tender mercy.

"Commit this sin; you can afterwards confess it." Such is the artifice with which the devil has drawn many souls into hell. Many Christians now in hell have been lost by this delusion. *The Lord waiteth that he may have mercy on you.*—(Is. xxx., 18). God waits for the sinner that the sinner may be converted and obtain mercy; but when God sees that the time which He allows the sinner for doing penance is employed only to increase the number of his offences, then He waits no longer but punishes him as he deserves.

Pardon me, O God, for I desire never more to offend Thee. And why should I delay? That Thou mayest condemn me to hell? I fear, indeed, that now Thou canst no longer have patience with me. I have, indeed, offended Thee too grievously. I am sorry for it. I repent of it. I hope for forgiveness through the merits of the Blood Thou hast shed for me.

II.

The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed: because his commiserations have not failed.—(Lam. iii., 22). Thus should he exclaim who finds to his confusion, that he has frequently offended God. He should be most grateful to God for not having suffered him to die in his sins, and be most careful not to offend Him again; otherwise the Lord will reproach him, saying: *What more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not done?*—(Is. v., 4). God will say to him: Ungrateful soul, if thou hadst committed the same offences against man, who is viler than the earth, verily he would not have borne with thee. And what great mercies have I not exercised towards thee! How many times have I not called thee, and enlightened thee, and pardoned thee? The time of punishment is at hand! The time of forgiveness is past!—Thus has God spoken to many who are now suffering in hell, where one of their greatest torments is the remembrance of the mercies they formerly received from God.

Jesus, my Redeemer and my Judge, I also have deserved to hear the same from Thy mouth; but I hear Thee now calling me again to pardon: *Be converted to the Lord thy God*—(Osee xiv., 2). O accursed sin which has made me lose my God, how much do I abhor and detest thee! I turn my whole soul towards Thee, my Lord and my God. My sovereign Good, I love Thee, and because I love Thee I repent with my whole soul for having during the time past, so much despised Thee. My God, I desire never more to offend Thee: give me Thy love, grant me perseverance. Mary, my refuge, succour and help me.

Second Sunday after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE TENDER COMPASSION OF MARY, AND HER READINESS TO ASSIST US IN ALL OUR WANTS.

They have no wine.—(Gospel of Sunday. Jo. ii., 1—11).

Mary showed, even when living in this world, the great compassion she would afterwards exercise towards us in our necessities. Without being asked, and listening only to the dictates of her compassionate heart, she lays before her Son the distress of the bride and bridegroom. *They have no wine.* If Mary unasked is so prompt to succour the needy, how much more so is she to succour those who invoke her aid and ask for her help?

I.

The tenderness of Mary's Mercy may be inferred from the fact related in to-day's Gospel. The wine fails, the spouses are troubled, no one speaks to Mary to ask her Son to console them in their necessity. But the tenderness of Mary's heart which, according to St. Bernardine of Sienna, cannot but pity the afflicted, moved her to take the office of advocate, and without being asked, to entreat her Son to work a miracle. "Unasked, she assumed the office of an advocate and a compassionate helper." Hence, adds the same Saint, if, unasked, this good Lady has done so much, what will she not do for those who invoke her intercession?

From what is related in the Gospel St. Bonaventure draws another argument to show the great graces we

may hope to obtain through Mary now that she reigns in Heaven. If she was so compassionate on earth, how much greater must be her mercy now that she is in Paradise? Great was the mercy of Mary while in exile on earth, but it is much greater now that she is a Queen in Heaven, because she now sees the misery of men. Mary in Heaven enjoys the vision of God, and therefore she sees our wants far more clearly than when she was on earth; hence, as her pity for us is increased, so also is her desire to assist us more ardent. Truly, then, has Richard of St. Victor spoken, addressing the Blessed Virgin: "So tender is thy heart thou canst not see misery without succouring it."

St. Peter Damien says that the Virgin "loves us with an invincible love." How ardently soever the Saints may have loved this amiable Queen, their affection fell far short of the love which Mary bore to them. It is this love that makes her so solicitous for our welfare. The Saints in Heaven, says St. Augustine, have great power to obtain grace from God for those who recommend themselves to their prayers; but as Mary is of all the Saints the most powerful, she is of all the most desirous to procure for us the divine Mercy.

O Mary, behold at thy feet a miserable slave of hell, who implores thy Mercy. I, indeed, deserve no favour, but thou art the Mother of Mercy, and Mercy is exercised in favour of those who are unworthy. The whole world calls thee the refuge and the hope of sinners; thou art, then, my refuge and my hope. I am a lost sheep, but it was to save the lost sheep the Eternal Word came down from Heaven and became thy Son. He wishes me to have recourse to thee and that thou assist me by thy prayers.

II.

Our great advocate Mary once said to St. Bridget, she regards not the iniquities of the sinner who has recourse to her, but the disposition with which he invokes her aid. If he comes to her with a firm purpose of amendment she receives him, and by her intercession heals

his wounds, and brings him to salvation. "However great a man's sins may be, if he return to me, I am ready instantly to receive him. Nor do I regard the number or the enormity of his sins, but the will with which he comes to me; for I do not disdain to anoint and heal his wounds, because I am called, and truly am, the Mother of Mercy." The Lord keeps His *eyes upon the just.*—(Ps. xxxiii., 16). But the Blessed Virgin keeps them upon the just and sinners, and acts towards each one of them precisely like a mother who has her eyes always fixed upon her child either to prevent it from falling or to raise it when fallen.

The Blessed Virgin is called *a fair olive tree in the plains.*—(Ecclus. xxiv., 19). From the olive, oil only comes forth; and from the hands of Mary only graces and mercies flow. According to Cardinal Hugo, it is said that she remains in the plains to show that she is ready to assist all those who have recourse to her.

St. Bonaventure used to say that in turning to Mary, he saw Mercy itself receiving him. "When I behold thee, O my Lady, I see nothing but Mercy." The Virgin said one day to St. Bridget that miserable, and miserable for eternity, shall be the sinner who, though he has it in his power during life to come to her who is able and willing to assist him, neglects to invoke her aid, and is lost. *The devil*, says St. Peter, *as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour.*—(1 Pet. v., 8). But this Mother of Mercy constantly goeth about in search of sinners to save them. This Queen of clemency presents our petitions, and begins to assist us before we ask the assistance of her prayers. Because Mary's heart is so full of tenderness towards us that she cannot behold our miseries without affording relief.

Let us, then, in all our wants, be most careful to have recourse to this Mother of Mercy who is always ready to assist those who invoke her aid. She is always prepared to come to our help and frequently anticipates our supplications; but ordinarily, she requires that we should pray to her, and is offended when we neglect to ask her assistance. Thou, O Blessed Lady, art displeased not only with those who commit an injury

against thee, but also with those who do not ask favours of thee, says St. Bonaventure. Hence, as the same holy Doctor teaches, it is not possible that Mary should neglect to succour a soul that flies to her for protection; for she cannot but pity and console the afflicted who have recourse to her.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners! O great Mother of God, thou prayest for all; pray to thy Son also for me. Tell Him that I am thy client and that thou art my protectress. Tell Him that in thee after Him I have placed all my hope. Tell Him to pardon me, that I repent of all the insults I have offered Him. Tell Him to grant me in His mercy holy perseverance. Tell Him to grant me the grace to love Him with my whole heart. In fine, tell Him to save me. He does whatsoever thou askest. O Mary, my hope, I trust in thee. Have pity upon me.

Spiritual Reading.

THE GREATNESS OF MARY'S POWER TO OBTAIN FOR US FROM GOD ALL THE GRACES OF WHICH WE STAND IN NEED.

And the wine failing, the mother of Jesus saith to him: They have no wine.—(Gospel of Sunday. Jo. ii., 1—11).

In to-day's Gospel we read that Jesus Christ having been invited, went with His holy Mother to a marriage at Cana of Galilee. *The wine failing*, Mary said to her divine Son: *They have no wine*. By these words she intended to ask her Son to console the spouses, who were afflicted because the wine had failed. Jesus answered: *Woman, what is it to me and to thee? My hour is not yet come*. He meant that the time destined for the performance of miracles was that of His preaching through Judea. But, though His answer appeared

to be a refusal of the request of Mary, the Son, says St. John Chrysostom, resolved to yield to the desire of the mother. "Although He said, *My hour is not yet come*, He granted the petition of His Mother." Mary said to the waiters: *Whatever he shall say to you do ye.* Jesus bade them fill the water-pots with water and the water was changed into most excellent wine. Thus the bridegroom and the entire family were filled with gladness.

From the fact related in this day's Gospel, let us consider *the greatness of Mary's power to obtain for us from God all the graces of which we are in need.*

So great is Mary's merit in the eyes of God, that, according to St. Bonaventure, her prayers are infallibly heard. "The merit of Mary is so great before God, that her petition cannot be rejected." But why are the prayers of Mary so powerful in the sight of God? It is, says St. Antoninus, because "the petition of the Mother of God partakes of the nature of a command, and therefore it is impossible that she should not be heard." The prayers of the Saints are the prayers of *servants*; but the prayers of Mary are the prayers of *a mother*, and therefore, according to the holy Doctor, they are, in a certain sense, regarded as commands by her Son Who loves her so tenderly. It is, then, impossible that the prayers of Mary should be rejected.

Hence, according to Cosmas of Jerusalem, the intercession of Mary is all-powerful—*Omnipotens auxilium tuum, O Maria!* It is right, as Richard of St. Laurence teaches, that the Son should impart His power to the Mother. Jesus Christ, Who is All-powerful, has made Mary omnipotent, as far as a creature is capable of omnipotence; that is, omnipotent in obtaining from Him, her divine Son, whatever she asks. Hence St. Bernardine of Sienna was able to say that all are subject to the power of Mary, and God Himself obeys her.

St. Bridget heard our Saviour one day addressing the Blessed Virgin in the following words: "Ask from Me whatever you wish, for your petition cannot be fruitless." My Mother, ask of Me what you please; I cannot

reject any prayer which you present to Me; "because since you refused Me nothing on earth, I will refuse you nothing in Heaven."

St. George, Archbishop of Nicomedia, says that Jesus Christ hears all the prayers of His Mother, as if He wished thereby to discharge the obligation which He owes to her for having given to Him His human nature, by consenting to accept Him for her Son. Hence, St. Methodius, Martyr, used to say to Mary: "Rejoice, rejoice, O holy Virgin; for thou hast for thy debtor that Son to Whom we are all debtors; to thee He owes the human nature which He received from thee."

St. Gregory of Nicomedia encourages sinners by the assurance that, if they have recourse to the Virgin Mary with a determination to amend their lives, she will save them by her intercession. Hence, turning to Mary, he exclaimed: "Thou hast insuperable strength, lest the multitude of our sins should overcome thy clemency." O Mother of God, the sins of a Christian, however great they may be, cannot overcome thy mercy. "Nothing," adds the same Saint, "resists thy power, for the Creator regards thy glory as His own." Nothing is impossible to thee, says St. Peter Damian, thou canst raise even those who are in despair to hopes of salvation.

Richard of St. Laurence remarks that, in announcing to the Blessed Virgin that God had chosen her for the mother of His Son, the Archangel Gabriel said to her: *Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.* —(Luke i., 30). From which words the same author concludes: "If we wish to recover lost grace, let us seek Mary by whom this grace has been found." She never lost divine grace; she always possessed it. If the angel declared that she had *found grace*, he meant that she had found it not for herself, but for us miserable sinners, who had lost it. Hence Cardinal Hugo exhorts us to go to Mary, and say to her: O Blessed Lady, property should be restored to those who lost it; the grace which thou hast found is not thine—for thou hast never lost the grace of God—but ours: we have lost it through our own fault; to us, then, thou oughtest to restore it. "Sinners, who by your sins have forfeited

the divine grace, run to the Virgin and say to her with confidence : Restore us to our property which thou hast found."

It was revealed to St. Gertrude, that all the graces which we ask of God through the intercession of Mary, will be given to us. She heard Jesus saying to His Divine Mother : " Through thee all who ask mercy with a purpose of amending their lives, shall obtain grace." If all Paradise asked a favour of God, and Mary asked the opposite grace, the Lord would hear Mary, and would reject the petition of the rest of the celestial host. " Because," says Father Suarez, " God loves the Virgin alone more than all the other Saints."

Let us, then, conclude in the words of St. Bernard : " Let us seek grace and let us seek it through Mary, for her petition cannot be rejected." Let us seek through Mary all the graces that we desire to receive from God, and we shall obtain them ; for she is a Mother, and her Son cannot refuse to hear her prayers or to grant the graces which she asks from Him.

But, to obtain special favours from this good Lady, we must perform in her honour certain devotions practised by her servants, as follows :

1. To recite every day at least five Decades of the *Rosary*.

2. To fast every Saturday in her honour. Many persons fast every Saturday on bread and water; you should fast in this manner at least on the Vigils of her seven principal Festivals.

3. To say the *Angelus*, morning, noon and evening, and to salute her frequently during the day with an *Ave Maria*, a *Hail Mary*, particularly when you hear the clock strike, or when you see her image, and also when you leave or return to your house.

4. To say every evening the *Litany of the Blessed Virgin* before you go to rest ; and for this purpose procure an image of Mary and keep it near your bed.

5. To wear the Scapulars of our Lady of Dolours, and of Mount Carmel.

6. There are many other devotions practised by the servants of Mary; but the most useful of all is, to recommend yourself frequently to her prayers. Never omit to say three *Hail Marys* in the morning, to beg of her to preserve you from sin during the day. In all temptations have immediate recourse to her. To resist every temptation, it is sufficient to pronounce the Names, *Jesus and Mary!* And if the temptation continues, let us continue to invoke Jesus and Mary, and the devil shall never be able to conquer us.

St. Bonaventure calls Mary the salvation of those who invoke her. And if a true servant of Mary were lost (I mean one truly devoted to her, who wishes to amend his life, and invoke with confidence this advocate of sinners), this would happen either because Mary was unable or unwilling to assist him. But, says St. Bernard, this is impossible: being the Mother of Omnipotence and of Mercy, Mary cannot want *the power*, or *the will*, to save her servants. Justly, then, is she called the salvation of all who invoke her aid. Of this truth there are numberless examples: that of St. Mary of Egypt will be sufficient. After leading for many years a sinful and dissolute life, she wished to enter the church of Jerusalem in which the Festival of the Holy Cross was being celebrated. To make her feel her miseries, God closed against her the door that was open to all others. As often as she endeavoured to enter, an invisible force drove her back. She instantly perceived her miserable condition, and remained in sorrow outside the church. Fortunately for her there was an image of most holy Mary over the porch of the church. As a poor sinner she recommended herself to the Divine Mother and promised to change her life. After her prayer she felt encouraged to go into the church; and behold, the door which was before closed against her she now finds open! She enters and confesses her sins. She leaves the church, and under the influence of divine inspiration, goes into the desert where she lived for forty-seven years and became a Saint.

Evening Meditation.

"PATIENT IN TRIBULATION."

I.

And patience hath a perfect work. It is by patience that we gain Heaven. This earth is a place where we can gain merit; therefore it is not a place of rest, but of labours and sufferings: and it is for this end that God leaves us here that by patience we may obtain the glory of Paradise. Every one has to suffer in this world, but he who suffers with patience suffers less and saves his soul, while he who suffers with impatience suffers more and is lost. Our Lord does not send us crosses that we may be lost, as some impatient people say, but that thereby we may be saved and acquire more glory in Heaven. Sorrows, contradictions, and all other tribulations, when accepted with patience, become the brightest jewels in our heavenly crown. Whenever, then, we are in affliction, let us console ourselves and thank God for it, since it is a sign that God wishes us to be saved, by chastising us in this life, where the chastisements are but slight and short, so as not to punish us in the next, where the chastisements are terrible and eternal. Woe to the sinner who is prosperous in this life! It is a sign that God has reserved for him eternal punishment.

St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi says: "All sufferings, however great, become sweet when we look at Jesus on the Cross." And St. Joseph Calasanctius: "He who cannot suffer for Jesus Christ, does not know how to gain Jesus Christ." He, then, who loves Jesus Christ bears patiently all external crosses—sickness, pains, dishonour, loss of parents and friends; and all interior crosses—afflictions, weariness, temptations, and desolation of spirit, and bears them all in peace. On the

other hand, he who is impatient and angry when in tribulation, only increases his suffering, and adds to his punishments in the next life.

O my Jesus, I deserve chastisement. I do not refuse it. I accept it. Preserve me only from the chastisement of being deprived of Thy love, and then do with me what Thou wilt. I love Thee, my dear Redeemer, I love Thee my God, and because I love Thee I wish to do whatever Thou willest. O Will of God, Thou art my love! O Blood of my God, Thou art my hope!

II.

St. Teresa says: "the Cross is felt by those who drag it after them by force, but he who embraces it with a good will does not feel it." Hence St. Philip Neri also said that in this world there is no *Purgatory*. It is either *Heaven* or *hell*. He who bears tribulation with patience is in Heaven, but he who does not is in hell. But you will say: "What evil have I done that I should be thus persecuted? Why have I had to suffer such an affront?" O Christian, go and speak thus to Jesus Christ on the Cross and He will answer: "And I, what have I done, that I should have to suffer such sorrow and ignominy, and this death of the Cross?" If, then, Jesus Christ has suffered so much for the love of you, it is not much that you should suffer this little for the love of Jesus Christ. Particularly if you have ever during your life committed some grievous sin, think that you deserve to be in hell, where you would have to suffer much greater contempt and persecution from the devils. If also you should be persecuted for having done good, rejoice exceedingly. Hear what Jesus Christ says: *Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice sake.*—(Matt. v., 10). Let us be convinced of the truth of what the Apostle says, that he who would live united with Jesus Christ in this world must be persecuted.

O Jesus, I will always say in whatever shall befall me, *Thy will be done!* My God, thus hast Thou willed,

thus I will. My God, I wish only what Thou wishest and may Thy will be always accomplished in me. My Jesus, through Thy merits, grant me the grace always to repeat the beautiful dictate of love—*Thy will be done! Thy will be done!*

Monday—Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE HOUR OF DEATH.

Be you, then, also ready; for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come.—(Luke xii., 40).

All know that they must die, but the misfortune is that many consider death at such a distance away that they lose sight of it. Even the old, the most decrepit and the most sickly flatter themselves that they will live three or four years longer. *At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come.*

I.

It is certain that we shall die, but the hour of death is uncertain. "Nothing," says the author who styles himself *Idiota*, "is more certain than death; but nothing is more uncertain than the hour of death." God has already fixed the year, the month, the day, the hour, and the moment, when I and you are to leave this earth and go into eternity; but the time is unknown to us. To exhort us to be always prepared, Jesus Christ tells us that death will come unawares, and like a thief in the night. *The day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night.*—(1 Thess. v., 2). He tells us to be, then,

always vigilant; because, when we least expect Him, He will come to judge us. *At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come.* St. Gregory says that for our good, God conceals from us the hour of death, that we may always be prepared to die. "Since, then," says St. Bernard, "death may take away life at any time and in any place, we ought, if we wish to die well and save our souls, to live always in expectation of death."

All know that they must die: but the misfortune is, that many consider death such a distance off, that they lose sight of it. Even the old, the most decrepit, and the most sickly, flatter themselves that they will live three or four years longer. But how many, I ask, have we known, even in our own times, to die suddenly—some sitting, some walking, some sleeping? It is certain that not one of these imagined that he should die so suddenly, and on the day he died. I say, moreover, that of all who have gone to the other world during the present year, no one imagined that he should die and end his days this year. Few are the deaths which do not happen unexpectedly.

Lord, the place in which I ought to be at this moment is not that in which I find myself, but hell, which I have so often merited by my sins! "*Infernus domus mea est*"—Hell is my house! St. Peter says: *The Lord waiteth patiently for your sake, not willing that any one should perish, but that all should return to penance.* —(2 Peter iii., 9). Then Thou hast had so much patience with me, and hast waited for me, because Thou didst wish me not to be lost, but return to Thee by repentance. My God, I return to Thee. I cast myself at Thy feet, and supplicate for mercy. *Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy.* Lord, to pardon me requires a great and extraordinary act of mercy, because I offended Thee, after I had been favoured with special light. Other sinners also have offended Thee, but they have not received the light Thou gavest me. But in spite of all my sinfulness and ingratitude, Thou commandest me to repent of my sins, and to hope for

pardon. Yes, my Redeemer, I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thee, and I hope for pardon through the merits of Thy Passion.

II.

When, therefore, Christian soul, the devil tempts you to sin by saying,—To-morrow you can go to confession—let your answer be, How do I know but this will be the last day of my life? If this hour, this moment, in which I would turn my back on God, were the last of my life, so that I should have no time for repentance, what would become of me for all eternity? To how many poor sinners has it happened, that in the act of feasting on the poison of sin they were struck dead and sent to hell? *As fishes are taken with the hook*, says Ecclesiastes, *so men are taken in the evil time.*—(Eccles. ix., 12). The evil time is that in which the sinner actually offends God. The devil tells you that this misfortune will not happen to *you*; but you should answer him: If it should happen to me, what would become of me for all eternity?

O my Jesus, though innocent, Thou hast wished to die like a criminal on the Cross, and to shed all Thy Blood to wash away my sins. *O Sanguis Innocentis, lava culpas pœnitentis!* O Blood of the Innocent, wash away the sins of the penitent! O Eternal Father, pardon me for the sake of Jesus Christ. Hear His prayers now that He intercedes for me and makes Himself my Advocate. But it is not enough to receive pardon; I desire also, O God, worthy of infinite love, the grace to love Thee. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good, and I offer Thee henceforth my body, my soul, my liberty, and my will. I wish henceforth to avoid not only grievous but also venial offences. I will fly from all occasions of sin. *Lead us not into temptation.* For the love of Jesus Christ, preserve me from the occasions in which I would offend Thee. *But deliver us from evil.* Deliver me from sin, and then chastise me as Thou pleasest. I accept all infirmities, pains, and losses which Thou mayest be pleased to send me: it is enough

for me not to lose Thy grace and Thy love. *Ask and you shall receive.*—(John xvi., 24). Thou promisest to grant whatever we ask; I ask these two graces—holy perseverance and the gift of Thy love. O Mary, Mother of Mercy, thou dost pray for me: in thee do I put my trust.

Spiritual Reading.

MARTYRS OF THE FAITH.

VIRTUES PRACTISED BY THE HOLY MARTYRS IN THE COMBATS THAT THEY HAD TO SUSTAIN AGAINST THEIR PERSECUTORS.

If the reading of the *Lives of the Saints* is a great means of preserving piety, as St. Philip Neri tells us, and as is taught by all the masters of the spiritual life, we shall find it yet more useful to read about the Victories the holy Martyrs gained by sacrificing their lives amid torments. Hence before relating their individual triumphs, we shall find it of great spiritual advantage to consider the principal virtues of which they gave proofs in their combats.

There is no doubt that the Martyrs are indebted for their crown to the power of the grace which they received from Jesus Christ; for He it is that gave them the strength to despise all the promises and the threats of tyrants, and to endure all torments even unto an entire sacrifice of their lives. So that all their merits, as St. Augustine writes, were the effects of the grace that God in His mercy imparted to them. But it is also certain, and even of Faith, that on their part the Martyrs co-operated with the grace which enabled them to win their victory. Innovators have blasphemed against this truth, saying that all the crimes of the wicked and all the good works of the just are the result of necessity; but the same St. Augustine gives them the lie when he says that if such were the case no reward or punishment would be just.

The Martyrs, therefore, acquired great merits, because the virtues of which they gave proofs in their combats were great and heroic. We shall briefly describe these virtues in order that we may imitate them in the midst of all the tribulations to which we may be exposed in this life.

We at first remark that the Martyrs were firmly attached to all the dogmas of the Christian Faith. In the early ages of the Church two false religions specially opposed ours: these were the religion of the Gentiles and that of the Jews. The religion of the Gentiles, by admitting several gods, furnished itself the proof of its falsity: for if the world had been under the dominion of several masters, it could not have maintained that regular and constant order which we see has been preserved for so many centuries up to the present time. This is evident even to the eyes of natural reason; *for every kingdom divided against itself shall be destroyed.*—(Luke xi., 17). Moreover, the very words of the idolatrous priests clearly demonstrated the falsity of their worship, since the actions that they attributed to their gods represented the latter as filled with passions and vices. This was how the holy Martyrs reproached the tyrants when the latter exhorted them to sacrifice to their idols: "How can we," they said, "adore your gods, if, instead of offering us models of virtue, they exhibit to us only examples of vice?"

The religion of the Jews, although formerly holy and revealed by God, was at that time not less manifestly obsolete and false. In fact, in the Scriptures themselves which they had received from God and had preserved with so much care and transmitted to us, it was predicted that at a certain time the Son of God was to come upon earth, to be made Man and to die for the salvation of the world: that they themselves would put Him to death on the Cross, as they actually did, and that in punishment of this impiety they would be driven from their own kingdom, and without a king, without a temple, without a country, they would live scattered, and be wanderers throughout the world, abhorred and despised by all nations. These were predictions that

were manifestly realized in every particular after the death of the Saviour. What rendered still more certain the truth of our Faith was the formation of a new people of God by the conversion of the Gentiles. This was known to have been announced beforehand in the Scriptures, and this was realized as soon as the Apostles spread throughout the world to promulgate the New Law preached by Jesus Christ. This event was an evident proof of the protection that God gave the Christian Religion; for how could those poor sinners, those publicans or fishermen, such as the Apostles were—men devoid of learning, of wealth, of every human assistance, and even persecuted by magistrates and emperors, have induced, without Divine assistance, so many Christians to renounce all their property, their honours, and generously to sacrifice their lives amid tortures the most excruciating that the power and the cruelty of the tyrants could invent?

Evening Meditation.

THE LOSS OF ALL THINGS IN DEATH.

I.

The day of destruction is at hand.—(Deut. xxxii., 35).

The day of death is called the *Day of Destruction*, because then is destroyed all that man has acquired; honours, friends, riches, possessions, kingdoms—all are then no more. What, then, doth it profit us to gain the whole world if in death we must leave all? All comes to an end at the bedside of the dying man. Is there any king, think you,—said St. Ignatius to Xavier when he sought to bring him to God,—who has taken with him into the other world even a thread of purple to mark his sovereignty? Has any rich man taken with him a single coin, or even one servant to

attend him? In death all is left behind. The soul enters eternity alone and unattended, except by its works.

Woe to me! Where are my works to accompany me to a blessed eternity? I can discover none but such as render me deserving of eternal torments!

Men come into the world in unequal conditions: one is born rich, another poor; one a noble, another a plebian; but all go out of it equal and alike. Consider the graves of the dead: see if you can discover among the bodies which are there interred, who was a master and who a servant, who was a king and who a beggar.

O God, while others amass the fortunes of this world, may my only fortune be Thy holy grace. Thou alone art my only Good both in this life and in the next.

II.

In one word, everything on earth will come to an end. All greatness will end, all misery will end, honours will end, ignominies will end, pleasures will end, sufferings will end. Blessed in death, therefore, not he who has abounded in riches, honours and pleasures, but he who has patiently endured poverty, contempt and sufferings! The possession of temporal goods affords no consolation at the moment of death: that alone consoles us which has been done or suffered for God.

O Jesus, detach my heart from this world before death entirely takes me from it. Help me with Thy grace. Thou indeed knowest how great is my weakness. Permit me not to be any longer unfaithful to Thee, as I have hitherto been. I am sorry, O Lord, for having so often despised Thee. Henceforward I will love Thee above every good, and die a thousand times rather than forfeit Thy grace. But the infernal one ceases not to tempt me. In mercy abandon me not; leave me not to myself; permit me not to be any more separated from Thy love. O Mary, my hope, obtain for me the grace of perseverance.

Tuesday—Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

WE SHOULD SETTLE OUR ACCOUNTS AT ONCE.

The Lord wishes that we be not lost but saved, and therefore by threats of chastisement He unceasingly exhorts us to a change of life. He Who wishes you to take care does not wish to destroy.

I.

Except you will be converted, he will brandish his sword.—(Ps. vii., 13). Behold, God says in another place, how many, because they would not cease to offend Me, have met with a sudden death, when they least expected it, and were living in peace, secure of a life of many years. For when they shall say: *Peace and security, then shall sudden destruction come upon them.* —(1 Thess. v., 3). Again God says: *Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish.*—(Luke xiii., 3). Why so many threats of chastisement before the execution of vengeance? It is because He wishes us to amend our lives, and thus avoid an unhappy death. He, says St. Augustine, who tells you to beware, does not wish to take away your life. It is necessary, then, to prepare our accounts before the day of accounting arrives. Dearly beloved Christian, were you to die, and were your lot for eternity to be decided before night, would your accounts be ready? Oh, how much would you give to obtain from God another year or month, or even another day, to prepare for Judgment? Why then do you not, now that God gives you this time, settle your accounts? Perhaps it may not happen—that

this shall be the last day for you? *Delay not to be converted to the Lord and defer it not from day to day; for his wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance he will destroy thee.*—(Ecclus. v., 8, 9). To save your soul you must give up sin. If, then, you must renounce it at some time, why do you not abandon it this very moment? Perhaps you are waiting till death arrives? But, for obstinate sinners, the hour of death is the time, not of pardon but of vengeance. *In the time of vengeance he will destroy thee.*

Ah, my dear Redeemer, Thou hast spent all Thy Blood, and hast given Thy life in order to save my soul, and I have often lost it by presuming on Thy mercy. I have, then, so often abused Thy goodness to offend Thee! By doing so, I have deserved to be suddenly struck dead, and to be cast into hell. In a word, I have been engaged in a contest with Thee. Thou didst treat me with mercy, and I offended Thee; Thou didst seek me, and I fled from Thee; Thou gavest me time to repair the evil I had done, and I employed that time in adding insults to insults. Lord, make me understand the injustice I have done Thee, and the obligation under which I am to love Thee. Ah, my Jesus, how could I be so dear to Thee Whom I chased away as often as Thou didst seek me. How hast Thou been able to bestow so many graces on one who has given Thee so much displeasure? From this I see the ardour of Thy desire to save me from perdition.

II.

Should any one borrow from you a large sum of money, you take care to get legal security for it. Who knows, you say, what may happen? Why are you not equally careful about the salvation of your soul, which is of far greater importance to you than all the riches of the earth? When eternity is at stake, why do you not say: *Who knows what may happen?* If you lose a sum of money, all is not lost; though in losing it your

entire property should be lost, you may still have hopes of recovering it. But if at death you lose your soul, then you shall truly have lost all, and can never hope to regain it. You are careful to keep an exact account of all the goods you possess, lest, by dying suddenly, any of them might be lost; and if you meet with a sudden death, and find yourself in enmity with God, what will become of your soul for all eternity?

I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thee, O infinite Goodness! Ah, receive this ungrateful sheep, that casts itself sorrowful at Thy feet; receive it and bind it on Thy shoulders, that it may never more stray away from Thee. I will never again abandon Thee. I wish to love Thee; I wish to be Thine, and, provided I belong to Thee, I am content to suffer every pain. And what greater punishment can fall upon me than to live without Thy grace, to be separated from Thee, Who art my God, Who hast created me and died for me? O accursed sins, what have you done? You have made me displease my Saviour Who has loved me so tenderly. Ah, my Jesus, as Thou hast died for me, so I ought to die for Thee. Thou hast died through love for me—I should die through sorrow for having despised Thee. I accept death in whatever manner and at whatever time Thou art pleased to send it. Hitherto I have not loved Thee, or I have loved Thee too little. I do not wish to die in this state. Ah, grant me a little more time that I may love Thee before I die. Change my heart; wound it; inflame it with Thy holy love. Through that affection of charity which made Thee die for me, grant me this favour. I love Thee with my whole heart. My soul is enamoured of Thee. Do not permit me to lose Thee. Give me holy perseverance. Give me Thy holy love. Most holy Mary, my refuge and my Mother, perform the office of advocate in my behalf. Amen.

Spiritual Reading.

MARTYRS OF THE FAITH—THEIR VIRTUES.

It was still more marvellous to behold so many Gentiles embrace a Religion difficult to believe and difficult to practise. It was a Religion difficult to believe, for it taught Mysteries beyond the reach of human reason; for example, the Trinity of One God in Three distinct Persons Who have but one Nature, one Power, and one Will; the Incarnation of the Son of God Who came upon earth to die for the salvation of mankind; and many other Articles regarding Original Sin, the spirituality and the immortality of the soul, the Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. It was difficult to practise because the Religion of Jesus Christ commanded things contrary to the inclinations of nature corrupted by sin and repugnant to the libertinism in which the pagans were living, accustomed as they were to follow their passions and to give themselves up to the pleasures of the senses. Nothwithstanding these obstacles, the Christian Religion was embraced by so many nations! From this universal consent of the nations St. Augustine argues the divinity of our Religion, saying that had not God illuminated by His powerful grace so many people—civilized and barbarian, learned and illiterate, noble and plebian, all immersed in the superstitions of their country, imbued from their earliest years with maxims so opposed to the sanctity of Faith—how could they have embraced it?

Besides the interior lights of grace, there were many other causes that induced the people to embrace Christianity and to remain firm in professing it. Miracles contributed much to inflame their zeal; for from the moment in which the Apostles began to preach, the Lord caused miracles to abound in testimony of the Faith, as St. Mark says: *They preached everywhere, the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with*

signs that followed.—(Mark xvi., 20). It is certain that the great miracles that had been wrought by the Apostles and their disciples contributed largely to the conversion of the world. In vain the adherents of idolatry tried to make men believe these prodigies were the effect of magical incantations : every one well understood that God would never permit them if they were to serve the purpose of giving support to diabolical agency or to a false religion. The proof of miracles was therefore a truly Divine proof by which the Lord confirmed the Christian Religion and the Faith of believers.

The Faith became further strengthened by the constancy of Martyrs of both sexes, of every age and condition; men and women, the aged and the young, the noble and the plebian, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, married and single. They were seen to renounce their homes, their parents, their titles, their fortunes, and everything they possessed, to embrace scourges, racks, fire, torture, and to encounter death under its most horrible aspects; and all this, not only with courage, but with joyfulness and thanksgiving to God, Who made them worthy to suffer and die for His love. St. Justin, who was himself a Martyr, confessed that this heroic virtue of the Christians had been to him a powerful stimulus to embrace the Faith.

The Martyrs received great courage in their sufferings from the desire of quickly arriving at the fruition of the promises made by Jesus Christ to His followers : *Blessed are ye when they shall revile you and persecute you. . . . Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven.*—(Matt. v., 11). *Every one therefore that shall confess me before men I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven.*—(Matt. x., 82).

But what above all filled the Martyrs with courage and ardour and made them wish to die was their great love for their Divine Master Whom St. Augustine calls the King of Martyrs, Who wished to die on the Cross in pain and in desolation for the love of us, as St. Paul says : *He hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us.* —(Eph. v., 2). Actuated by this love, they went with joy to suffer and to die for Jesus Christ; so that, not

content with enduring the pains that were inflicted upon them, they besought, they provoked the executioners and the tyrants, to obtain from them an increase of torture, in order that they might show themselves more grateful to God Who died for love of them.

Hence it came to pass, according to St. Justin, that in the course of three Centuries the whole earth was filled with Martyrs and Christians. "There is no nation, Greek or barbarian," writes the holy Martyr to Trypho, "that does not offer prayers and thanksgivings to the Creator of the universe by invoking the Name of Jesus Christ." St. Irenæus, in like manner, attests that at his time the Faith of Jesus Christ was extended over the entire world. Pliny, in his celebrated letter to the Emperor Trajan, declared that the Christian Faith was spread to such a degree that the temples of the gods were abandoned, and that victims were no longer offered to the idols. And Tiberian also wrote to the same Emperor that it would be unwise to put to death all the Christians, since the number of those who were anxious to die for Jesus Christ was incalculable.

Evening Meditation.

THE ABUSE OF GOD'S MERCY.

I.

There are two ways by which the devil endeavours to deceive men to their eternal ruin. After they have committed sin he tempts them to despair on account of the severity of Divine justice; while before they had sinned he encouraged them to do so by the hope of obtaining the Divine mercy. And he effects the ruin of numberless souls as much by the second as by the first artifice. "God is merciful," says the obstinate sinner to him who would convert him from the iniquity of his ways. "God is merciful." But as the Mother of God

expresses it in her Canticle, *His mercy is to them that fear him.*—(Luke i., 50). Yes, the Lord deals mercifully with him who fears to offend Him, but not with the man who presumes upon His mercy to offend Him still more.

O God, I give Thee thanks for having made me sensible of Thy patience in bearing with me. Behold, I am of the number of those who, presuming on Thy goodness, have offended Thee again and again!

God is merciful,—but He is also just! Sinners are desirous that He should be merciful only, without being just; but that is impossible, because were He only to forgive and never to chastise, He would be wanting in justice. Hence Blessed Father Avila observes that patience on the part of God towards those who avail themselves of His compassion to offend Him all the more, would not be mercy but a want of justice. He is bound to chastise the ungrateful. He bears with them for a certain time, but after that abandons them.

Such a punishment, O God, has not as yet overtaken me, or else I had now dwelt in hell, or had been obstinate in my sins. But no: I desire to amend my life; I desire to offend Thee no more. Though I have hitherto displeased Thee, I am sorry for it with my whole soul. I desire henceforth to love Thee, and I desire to love Thee more than others, because Thou hast not shown the same patience towards others as towards me.

II.

God is not mocked.—(Gal. vi., 7). But He would be mocked if the sinner could go on continually offending Him, and yet afterwards enjoy Him in Heaven. *What things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap.*—(Gal. vi., 8). He who sows good works shall reap rewards; but he who sows iniquities shall reap chastisements. The hope of those who commit sin because God is forgiving, is an abomination in His sight. *Their hope*, says holy Job, *is an abomination.*—(Job xi., 20). Hence the sinner, by just such hope, provokes God to

chastise him the sooner, as that servant would provoke his master, who, because his master was good, took advantage of his goodness to behave wickedly.

O Jesus, such, I fear, has been my conduct towards Thee. Because Thou wast good I made no account of Thy precepts! I confess that I have done wickedly, and I detest all the offences I have committed against Thee. Now I love Thee more than myself, and I desire never more to displease Thee. Ah, if I should again offend Thee by mortal sin! Permit it not, O Lord, but rather let me die. O Mary, Mother of perseverance, do thou assist me.

Wednesday Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

"*BE YE READY.*"

The Lord does not tell us *to prepare ourselves for death*, but *to be prepared*, when death arrives. Be ye ready! The time of death will not be the time to prepare ourselves to die well. To die well and happily we must prepare ourselves beforehand.

I.

Be ye ready. The Lord does not tell us to prepare ourselves, but to be prepared, when death arrives. When death comes it will be almost impossible, in that tempest and confusion, to tranquillise a troubled conscience. This, reason tells us: this, God threatens, saying that then He will come, not to pardon, but to avenge, the contempt of His graces. *Revenge is mine, I will repay.*—(Rom. xii., 19). It is, says St. Augustine, a just punishment, that he who was unwilling, when he

was able, to save his soul, will not be able when he is willing. But you will say : Perhaps I may still be converted and saved. Would you throw yourself into a deep well, saying, Perhaps I may not be drowned? O God ! how sin blinds the understanding, and deprives the soul of reason. When there is question of the body, men speak rationally; but when the soul is concerned, they speak like fools.

Who knows, dear Christian, but this point which you read is the last warning that God may send you? Let us immediately prepare for death, that it may not come upon us without giving us time to prepare for judgment. St. Augustine says that God conceals from us the last day of life, that we may be always prepared to die. St. Paul tells us that we must work out our salvation, not only with fear, but also with trembling. St. Antoninus relates that a certain king of Sicily, to make one of his subjects understand the fear with which he sat on the throne, commanded him to sit at table with a sword suspended over him by a slender thread. The apprehension that the thread might give way filled him with so much terror that he could scarcely taste food. We are all in like danger; for the sword of death, on which our eternal salvation depends, may at any moment fall upon us.

Ah my God ! who has ever loved me more than Thou hast? And whom have I despised and insulted more than I have insulted Thee? O Blood ! O Wounds of Jesus, you are my hope. Eternal Father, look not upon my sins, but look at the Wounds of Jesus; behold Thy Son dying through pain for my sake, and asking Thee to pardon me. I repent, O my Creator, of having offended Thee. I am sorry for it above all things. Thou didst create me that I might love Thee; and I have lived as if Thou hadst created me to offend Thee.

II.

It is indeed a question of Eternity. *If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in which place soever it shall fall there shall it lie.*—(Eccles. xi., 3). If, when death

comes, we are found in the grace of God, oh! with what joy shall we say: I have secured all; I can never again lose God; I shall be happy forever. But, if death finds the soul in sin, with what despair will it exclaim: *Ergo erravimus!* I have erred! And for my error there will be no remedy for all eternity. The fear of an unhappy eternity made the Blessed Father Avila, apostle of Spain, say, when the news of death was brought to him: Oh! that I had a little more time to prepare for death! This fear made the Abbot Agatho, who spent so many years in penance, say at death: What will become of me? Who can know the judgments of God? St. Arsenius, too, trembled at the hour of death; and being asked by his disciples, why he was so much alarmed, he said: "My children, this fear is not new to me; I have had it always during my whole life." Above all, holy Job trembled when he said: *What shall I do when the Lord shall rise to judge? and when he shall examine, what shall I answer him?*—(Job xxxi., 14).

O Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ, pardon me and give me grace to love Thee. I have hitherto resisted Thy will, but I will resist no longer, and will do whatsoever Thou commandest. Thou commandest me to detest the outrages I have offered Thee; behold, I detest them with my whole heart. Thou commandest me to resolve to offend Thee no more; behold, I resolve to lose my life a thousand times, rather than forfeit Thy grace. Thou commandest me to love Thee with my whole heart; yes, with my whole heart I love Thee, and I wish to love nothing else but Thee. Thou wilt henceforth be my only beloved, my only love. From Thee I ask, and from Thee I hope for holy perseverance. For the love of Jesus Christ grant that I may be always faithful to Thee, and that I may always say to Thee, with St. Bonaventure: "My beloved is one, my love is one." I do not wish that my life be employed any longer in giving Thee displeasure; I wish to spend it only in weeping over the offences I have committed against Thee, and in loving Thee. Mary, my Mother, pray for all who recommend themselves to thee,—pray to Jesus also for me.

Spiritual Reading.

"*THE BLOOD OF MARTYRS THE SEED OF CHRISTIANS.*"

From the foregoing facts Clement of Alexandria subsequently inferred, that if God Himself had not upheld the Christian Faith, it could never have withstood the efforts of so many philosophers who endeavoured to obscure it with sophisms, or the violence of so many kings and emperors who laboured to extinguish it by persecution. The number of Christians, far from having been diminished by the slaughter of the Saints, became so wonderfully increased, that Tertullian said: "Our number grows in the same measure that you decimate us; the Blood of the Christians is as it were a seed." He used the word *seed* because the Blood of the Martyrs was that which multiplied the faithful. Tertullian, indeed, boasted of this, and upbraided the tyrants with their impotency; since, notwithstanding all their endeavours to exterminate the followers of the Gospel, the streets, the Forum, and even the Senate, were filled with Christians. Origen likewise wrote: "It is a thing worthy of note and eminently calculated to excite wonder, the steady progress of the Christian Religion, in spite of the most untiring persecution and continual Martyrdoms." "Greeks and barbarians," continues this celebrated writer, "the learned and unlearned, voluntarily embraced it; from which we may conclude that its propagation is due to a higher than human power."

Before the end of the Second Century, we are assured by Tertullian, that all nations (*universæ gentes*) had embraced the Faith of Jesus. He makes special mention of the Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, of Armenia, and of Phrygia, of Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Cirenasia, and Palestine; the Gethuli, the whole of Spain, many of the

Gallic tribes, Bretagne, the Sarmatians, the Dacians, the Scythians, and many remote nations, provinces and islands. Arnobius, who died a hundred years after Tertullian, adds to the list of those converted to the Faith, the Indians, the Sarii, the Persians, and the Medes; Arabia, Syria, Gallacia, Acaja, Macedonia, and Epirus, with all the islands and provinces from the rising to the setting sun. Besides those regions enumerated by Tertullian, St. Athanasius, half a century afterwards, mentions others. Writing to the Emperor Jovinian, he says: "Know that this Faith has been preached from the beginning, approved by the Nicene Fathers, and professed by all the Churches of the world—in Spain, in England, and in Gaul; throughout the whole of Italy, in Dalmatia, Dacia, Mysia, and Macedonia; in all Greece, and in all Africa; in Sardinia, Cyprus, Crete, Pamphylia, Lysia, and Isauria; in Egypt and Lybia, in Pontus and Cappadocia."

Thus we see that, after the Ten Persecutions of the Roman emperors, which lasted for more than two hundred years, beginning from the first under Nero, the greater part of the human race, having abandoned the worship of false deities, had embraced the doctrines of Christianity. Finally, after so many struggles, it pleased the Almighty Disposer of events to grant peace to His Church under Constantine. This emperor was, after a miraculous manner, chosen by Heaven for the carrying out of the merciful dispensations of Divine Providence. Having first overcome Maxentius and afterwards Licinius, in the strong arm of the Lord,—for, as Eusebius relates, in whatever direction the *Labarum*, or Standard of the Cross, appeared, the enemy either fled or surrendered,—after peace had been established he forbade the Gentiles to sacrifice any longer to their idols, and caused magnificent temples to be erected to the honour of Jesus Christ. And oh, how glorious did not the Church then appear! Still more widely extending her blessed influence, and, with every new conquest, bringing additional joy to the hearts of her once persecuted children! Then ceased the torments of the Martyr, and with them the bitter calumnies of the idolater. Busy

multitudes of zealous converts were to be seen in every city destroying the idols they once adored, pulling down the ancient shrines of superstition, and erecting new Altars to the worship of the true God! The confines of so vast an empire were too narrow a limit for the active zeal of the great Constantine. He laboured to propagate the saving doctrines of Religion in Persia and among the barbarous nations he had subdued; nor would he, according to Eusebius and Socrates, grant them the friendship of the Roman Empire except upon the condition of their becoming Christians.

Evening Meditation.

THE EMPTINESS AND SHORTNESS OF HUMAN LIFE.

Holy David said that the happine s of this life is as the dream of one awaking from sleep : *As the dream of them that awake.*—(Ps. lxxii., 20). All the greatness and glory of this world will appear no more to poor worldlings at the hour of death than a dream to one awaking from sleep, who finds that the fortune he had acquired in his dreams ends with his sleep. Hence did one who was undeceived wisely write on the skull of a dead man : *Cogitanti omnia vilescunt: To one who thinks, all things are worthless.* Yes, to him who thinks on death, all the goods of this life appear, as they really are, vile and transitory. Nor can that man fix his affections on the earth who reflects that in a short time he must leave it forever. Ah, my God, how often have I despised Thy grace for the miserable goods of this world! From henceforth I desire to think of nothing but of loving and serving Thee. Assist me with Thy holy grace.

And is it thus then, that worldly grandeur and sovereign power must end! Such was the exclamation

of St. Francis Borgia, when he beheld the corpse of the Empress Isabella, who had died in the flower of her youth. Reflecting upon what he saw, he resolved to bid adieu to the world, and to give himself entirely to God, saying: I will henceforward serve a master who will never forsake me. Let us detach ourselves from the goods of the present life before death tears us away from them. What folly it is to expose ourselves to the danger of losing our souls, for the sake of some attachment to this miserable world, from which we shall soon have to depart, for soon it will be said to us by the minister of God: *Go forth, Christian soul, out of this world!* O my Jesus that I had always loved Thee! How many offences have I been guilty of against Thee! Teach me how to correct my disorderly life, for I am willing to do whatever Thou pleasest. Accept of my love, accept of my repentance, in which I love Thee more than myself, and crave Thy mercy and compassion.

II.

Reflect that you cannot remain for ever in this world. You must one day leave the country in which you now reside; you must one day go out from the house in which you now dwell, to return to it no more. Think that many before you inhabited the same room in which you are at present reading; that they slept in the same bed in which you are accustomed to sleep: and where are they now? Gone into eternity. The same will happen to you. Make me to understand, O God, the injustice I have been guilty of in turning my back upon Thee, my Sovereign Good; and grant me sorrow to bewail my ingratitude as I ought. O that I had died rather than ever offend Thee. Suffer me not to live any longer ungrateful for the love Thou hast shown me. My dear Redeemer, I love Thee above all things and I desire to love Thee with all my strength during the remainder of my life. Strengthen my weakness by Thy grace. And do thou, O Mary, Mother of God, intercede for me. Amen.

Thursday—Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.
(For Twenty-Fifth of January).

THE LIFE OF SORROW JESUS LED EVEN FROM HIS BIRTH.

The Prophet Isaias calls Jesus Christ *the man of sorrows*, because His life was to be full of sorrow. His Passion did not begin at the time of His death. It commenced with His life—a life of internal and external sorrows from beginning to end.

I.

Jesus Christ could have saved man without suffering and without dying; but no, He chose a life full of tribulations in order to make us know how much He loved us. Therefore the Prophet Isaias called Him *the Man of sorrows*—(Is. liii., 3), because the life of Jesus Christ was to be a life full of sorrows. His Passion did not begin at the time of His death, but from the commencement of His life.

Behold Him, as soon as He is born, laid in a stable where for Jesus everything is a torment. His sight is tormented by seeing nothing in the cave but black, rough walls. His sense of smell is tormented by the stench of the dung of beasts lying there. His sense of touch is tormented by the pricking of the straw that serves Him as a bed. Soon after His birth He is obliged to fly into Egypt where He passed several years of His childhood poor and despised. The life which He afterwards led in Nazareth was not less poor and lowly. Behold Him at length terminating His life in Jerusalem, dying on a Cross by dint of torments.

O my sweet Love, have I, then, by my sins kept Thee in a state of affliction all Thy life long? Oh, tell me, then, what I can do that Thou mayest forgive me, for I will leave nothing undone. I repent, O sovereign Good, of all the offences I have committed against Thee; I repent, and I love Thee more than myself. I feel a great desire to love Thee. It is Thou that givest me this desire; give me, therefore, strength to love Thee ardently.

II.

Thus, then, the life of Jesus was one of continual suffering, and, indeed, a double suffering; for He had constantly before His eyes all the sorrows that would afflict Him until the day of His death. Sister Mary Magdalen Orsini, complaining one day before the Crucifix, said to Him: "O Lord, Thou wert on the Cross only for three hours, but I have suffered this pain for several years." Jesus answered her: "Oh, ignorant that thou art, what dost thou say? I suffered even from My Mother's womb all the pains of My life and My death." But all these sufferings did not so much afflict Jesus Christ—because He chose voluntarily to suffer them—as did the sight of our sins, and of our ingratitude for His great love. St. Margaret of Cortona was never satisfied with weeping over the offences she committed against God. Wherefore her confessor said to her one day: "Margaret, cease crying, because God has already forgiven thee." But she replied: "Ah, Father, how can I cease weeping, when I know that my sins kept Jesus Christ in a state of affliction all His life?"

It is only just, O Jesus, that I, who have offended Thee so much, should also love Thee much. Oh, remind me constantly of the love Thou hast borne me, in order that my soul may always burn with the love of Thee; that it may think of Thee alone, desire Thee alone, and strive to please Thee alone. O God of love, I, who once was the slave of hell, now give myself entirely to Thee. Accept me in Thy mercy, O Jesus, and bind me with Thy love, from this day forth. I will love Thee in

life, and loving Thee I will die. O Mary, my Mother and my hope, help me to love Thy dear Jesus and mine. This favour alone I desire and hope from thee.

Spiritual Reading.

"*THE HAND OF THE LORD IS NOT SHORTENED.*"

True it is that from time to time divers heresies have sprung up in the Church, which have been productive of much evil; *but the hand of the Lord hath not been* shortened. Even in these latter days we have had authentic accounts of very considerable advances made by the Church, both among heretics and pagans. A learned author writes that ten thousand Arians have recently been converted in Transylvania. In Prussia a very large number of Catholic churches have been erected. In Denmark the public profession of the Catholic Religion is now tolerated. The missions in England are being carried on with very happy results. We have been assured by persons of authority and undoubted veracity, that in the East forty thousand Armenian and other oriental heretics have been received into the communion of our holy Church; that in Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Chaldea the number of Catholics is every day increasing; and that during the last few years several Nestorian Bishops have abjured the errors of that sect. Finally, during the present Century a considerable number of pagans have been converted in India and China.

But to return to the Martyrs. The number of Christians who had received the Crown of Martyrdom previous to the accession of Constantine was almost incredible. Many authors calculate the number of those who had laid down their lives for the Faith to have been nearly eleven millions! So that if this number were equally distributed in the course of one year, thirty thousand would be allotted to each day.

Oh, the beautiful harvest of holy Martyrs that Paradise has reaped since the preaching of the Gospel! But, O God, what will be the confusion of the tyrants and of all the persecutors of the Faith on the day of General Judgment, at the sight of the Martyrs once so despised and so maltreated by them, when these celestial heroes shall appear in glory, extolling the greatness of God, and armed with the sword of divine justice to avenge themselves for all the injuries and cruelties exercised against them, as was foretold by David: *The high praises of God in their mouths, and two-edged swords in their hands to execute vengeance upon the nations; to bind their kings in fetters, and their nobles in manacles of iron.*—(Ps. cxlix., 6). Then shall the Martyrs judge the Neros, the Domitians, and other persecutors, and shall condemn them; yea, as we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew, *even to the exterior darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*—(Matt. xxii., 13).

But it will be for us a subject of more profitable meditation to reflect upon another scene which the great day of general and irrevocable doom will present—the despair of so many Christians who, having died in mortal sin, will behold with unavailing anguish the triumph of so many Martyrs, who, rather than lose God, suffered themselves to be despoiled of all things, and underwent the most horrid torments that hell could suggest or tyrants inflict; while they, rather than yield a point of honour or forego a momentary gratification, despised the suggestions of divine grace and lost their souls forever!

Evening Meditation.

THE CONTEMPT WITH WHICH THE SINNER TREATS GOD.

I.

God Himself declares that the sinner treats Him with contempt and complains of it in these words: *I have brought up children, and exalted them; but they have*

despised me.—(Is. i., 2). I have brought up My children, I have preserved and nourished them, but with base ingratitude they have despised Me. But who is God Who is thus despised by men? He is the Creator of Heaven and earth; He is the sovereign, infinite Good, in Whose sight men and Angels are as a drop of water, or a grain of sand: *as a drop of a bucket . . . as a little dust.*—(Is. xl., 15). In a word, all things created, in the presence of His infinite greatness, are as though they were not: *All nations are before him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to him nothing and vanity.* —(Is. xl., 17).

Behold me, O God, a daring sinner who has presumed to despise Thy infinite majesty. But whilst Thou art infinite majesty, Thou art also infinite mercy. I love Thee, O Lord, and because I love Thee I am sorry for having offended Thee; do Thou have pity on me.

And, O God, who am I who have despised Thee? A poor helpless worm who have nothing but what Thou in Thy bounty hast bestowed upon me. Thou hast given me my soul, my body, the use of reason, and numberless other benefits in this world; and I have made no other use of them all but to offend Thee, my Benefactor. Nay, more; at the very time that Thou didst preserve my life, that I might not fall into hell as I deserved, I abused Thy goodness and forbearance. O my Saviour, how couldst Thou have had such patience with me? Wretch that I am, how many nights have I slept under Thy displeasure! But Thou wouldst not have me perish. I trust, O my Jesus, in Thy Blessed Passion that Thou wilt enable me to change my life. Let not that sacred Blood be lost, which with so much pain and sorrow Thou didst shed for my salvation.

II.

Man is a miserable worm that can do nothing; he is so blind that he knows nothing; so poor and naked that he possesses nothing. And this miserable worm voluntarily insults God! Vile dust, says St. Bernard, dares to provoke such tremendous Majesty!

O God, what have I done? Thou, my Redeemer, hast shown such regard for my soul as to shed Thy Blood for its salvation, and I have been so wretched as to allow it to perish for a mere nothing, for a caprice, for a maddening passion, for a miserable gratification, in contempt of Thy grace and love. Ah! if Faith did not assure me that Thou didst promise to pardon those who repent, I should not now dare to implore Thy forgiveness. O my Saviour, I kiss Thy sacred Wounds, and for the love of these Wounds I beseech Thee to forget the injuries I have committed against Thee. Thou hast said that when the sinner repents, Thou wilt forget all his ingratitude. I am sorry above every evil for having despised Thee, my sovereign Good; make haste to pardon me, as Thou hast promised; let me be quickly reconciled to Thee. I love Thee now more than myself; may I never more incur Thy displeasure! O Mary, refuge of sinners, succour a poor sinner who invokes thy assistance.

Friday Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

ANGUISH OF THE DYING SINNER.

The poor dying sinner will be assailed, not by one, but by many causes of distress and anguish. Devils will tempt him, and his sins like so many satellites will say to him: *We are thy works; we shall not desert thee.*

I.

The poor dying sinner will be assailed, not by one, but by many causes of distress and anguish. On the one hand the devils will torment him. At death these horrid enemies exert all their strength to secure the perdition of the soul that is about to leave this world. They know that they have but little time to gain it, and that if they lose it at death, they lose it forever. *The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time.*—(Apoc. xii., 12). The dying man will be tempted, not by one, but by innumerable devils who will labour for his damnation. *Their houses shall be filled with serpents.*—(Is. xiii., 21). One tempter will say : Fear not; you will recover. Another : You have been deaf to the inspirations of God for so many years, and do you now expect that He will have mercy on you? Another will ask : How can you make satisfaction for all the injuries you have done to the property and character of your neighbours? Another : Do you not see that your Confessions have been useless; that they have been made without sorrow or purpose of amendment? How will you be able to repair them now?

On the other hand, the dying man will see himself surrounded by his sins. *Evils*, says David, *shall catch the unjust man unto destruction.*—(Ps. cxxxix., 12). These sins, says St. Bernard, shall, like so many satellites, keep him in chains, saying unto him : We are your works; we shall not desert you. We are your fruits, and we will not leave you; we will accompany you into the other world and will present ourselves with you to the Eternal Judge. The dying man will then wish to shake off such enemies; but, to get rid of them, he must detest them and return sincerely to God. His mind is darkened and his heart hardened. *A hard heart shall fare evil at the last; and he that loveth danger shall perish in it.*—(Ecclus. iii., 27). St. Bernard says that the man who has been obstinate in sin during life, will

make efforts, but without success, to get out of the state of damnation; and that, overwhelmed by his own malice, he will end his life in the same unhappy state.

My dear Saviour, assist me; do not abandon me. I see my whole soul covered with the wounds of sin; my passions attack me violently; my bad habits weigh me down. I cast myself at Thy feet; have pity on me and deliver me from so many evils. *In thee, O Lord, I have hoped; may I not be confounded forever.*—(Ps. xxx., 6). Do not suffer a soul that trusts in Thee to be lost. *Deliver not up to beasts the souls that confess to thee.*—(Ps. lxxiii., 19).

II.

Having loved sin till death, the sinner has also loved the danger of damnation. Hence the Lord will justly permit him to perish in that danger in which he has voluntarily lived till the end of his life. St. Augustine says that he who is abandoned by sin before he abandons it, will scarcely detest it as he ought; because what he will then do will be done through necessity.

Miserable the sinner that hardens his heart and resists the divine calls: *His heart shall be as hard as a stone and as firm as a smith's anvil.*—(Job xli., 15). Instead of yielding to the graces and inspirations of God, and being softened by them, the unhappy man becomes more obdurate, as the anvil is hardened by repeated strokes of the hammer. In punishment of his resistance to the divine calls, he will find his heart in the same miserable state at the very hour of death, at the moment of passing into eternity. *A hard heart shall fare evil at the last.* Sinners, says the Lord, have, for the love of creatures, turned their back upon Me. *They have turned their back upon me and not their face; and in the time of their affliction they will say: Arise and deliver us! Where are the gods thou hast made thee? Let them arise and deliver thee.*—(Jer. ii., 27). They will have recourse to God at death; but He will say to them: Is it to Me you have recourse now? Call on creatures to succour you, for they have been your gods! The

Lord will address them in this manner, because, in seeking Him, they do not sincerely wish to be converted. St. Jerome says that he holds, and has learned from experience, that they who have to the end led a bad life, will never die a good death.

I am sorry for having offended Thee, O infinite Goodness. I have done evil, I confess my guilt. I wish to amend my life, whatsoever it may cost me. But if Thou dost not help me by Thy grace, I am lost. Receive, O my Jesus, the rebel who has so grievously outraged Thy Majesty. Remember that I have been purchased by Thy Blood and Thy life. Through the merits then of Thy Passion and Death, receive me into Thy arms and give me holy perseverance. I was lost, Thou hast called me back: I will resist no longer: to Thee I consecrate myself. Bind me to Thy love and never permit me to lose Thee by again losing Thy grace. My Jesus, do not permit it. Mary, my Queen, do not permit it: obtain for me death and a thousand deaths, rather than that I should again forfeit the grace of thy Son.

Spiritual Reading.

THE MARTYRS TEACH US TO DESPISE THE WORLD AND TO LOVE THE FAITH.

From an earnest consideration of the illustrious examples of virtue which the Saints have given us during their Martyrdom, oh, how much is to be learned!

When we behold in devout meditation, *the utter contempt* in which the Martyrs held the world and all the allurements of its pompous vanities, we are taught *to despise the fleeting vanities and empty pleasures which it offers its deluded votaries.* Many of them, previous to having been put to torture, had been offered by the tyrants immense rewards, posts of honour and noble marriages, to induce them to abandon the

Faith. Yet they not only indignantly refused them, but willingly renounced the riches and honours which they already held, and offered themselves to tortures the most excruciating and deaths the most ignominious, in order not to lose those heavenly graces which a benign Providence fails not to impart to the servants of the Lord, as the earnest of the eternal blessings which shall be the recompense of their fidelity. To St. Clement of Ancyra the tyrant offered a great quantity of gold and precious stones if he would deny the Name of the Lord Jesus; but the Saint, raising his eyes to Heaven, exclaimed: "And is it thus, O my God, that men treat Thee!—to compare Thee to dust and dross!" The pontifical dignity was offered to St. Theodore of Amasea, as a reward if he gave up the Faith. The holy Martyr, ridiculing the proposal, replied: "Pontifical dignity! I am about to enjoy God forever in Heaven; and is it likely, think you, that I should prefer remaining on earth, to follow the trade of cook and butcher like your priests who offer sacrifice to false gods?"

From the example of the Martyrs *we learn also to place our hope in God, and to become daily more enamoured of the excellence of our Faith*: since in their constancy we cannot help admiring the wonderful power of God which enabled them to encounter torments and death with heroic fortitude and ecstatic joy. For without the interposition of the most powerful assistance from Heaven, how could persons of a delicate constitution, or in the tottering decrepitude of age, how could tender virgins and children be equal to tortures, the bare recital of which fills us with horror? Caldrons of boiling oil and liquid pitch; red-hot coats of mail; hooks to pull out the eyes and teeth; iron combs to tear off the flesh; fires quick to consume, or tediously to torture; scourging until bones and bowels appeared: beheading, quartering, lacerating, impaling—these were only some of the ingredients of the Martyr's cup.

St. Barlaam, a poor labourer of a village in Antioch, having evinced extraordinary fortitude during his sufferings, and been scourged until the executioners had exhausted their strength, was forced by the tyrant to

hold his hand over the flame that burned before the shrine of an idol. At the same time burning coals were placed with some incense upon his hand, in the hope that he might be obliged by the pain to let the burning incense fall upon the altar, and thus afford them the opportunity of asserting that he had sacrificed to the idols; but the constancy of the Saint was greater than their malice—he allowed his flesh to be burned to the bone, and expired in the effort.

St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom have eulogized this Martyr.

St. Eulalia affords another instance of the wonderful aid the Almighty gives to those who are devoted to His service. She was a youthful virgin, of only twelve years. The tyrant ordered her to be cruelly scourged, and then caused boiling oil to be poured into the wounds, and burning torches to be applied to her breasts and sides. During these tortures she ceased not to praise the Lord. Her joints were entirely dislocated, the flesh torn from her bones with iron hooks, and she was finally burned alive, having baffled the ingenuity of her inhuman executioners.

The Martyrdom, also, of St. Vitus and St. Agapitus shows us the wonderful assistance of grace, which never fails the servants of the Lord. The former when only fourteen years of age, was scourged, racked, and torn with irons. His father who was a Gentile, wept with anguish to see his son expire in such torments. "No, father," exclaimed the boy, "I do not die: I go to live with Christ forever!" St. Agapitus, also a youth, evinced the same fortitude. The tyrant threatened that he would place upon his head a red-hot helmet: "And what better fortune could await me," said the Saint, "than to exchange your instrument of torture for a heavenly crown?" Then the emperor ordered that red-hot coals should be placed on his head, that he be scourged, and suspended by the feet over a thick smoke. He afterwards had boiling water poured over his breast, and finally had him beheaded.

The triumph of divine grace in the aged was manifested in St. Simeon, who at the age of one hundred and

twenty endured the most excruciating tortures and expired on a cross, as is related by Eusebius of Cæsarea. St. Philip, Bishop of Heraclea, in his decrepit old age, was dragged by the feet through the city, scourged till his bowels appeared, and afterwards burned alive. The venerable Martyr, till his last breath, ceased not to return thanks to the Lord Who had made him worthy to die for His glory.

Evening Meditation.

HE HATH LOVED US AND WASHED US FROM OUR SINS IN HIS OWN BLOOD.

I.

So, then, my Jesus, in order to save my soul, Thou hast prepared a bath of thine own Blood wherein to cleanse it from the filth of its sins. If, therefore, our souls have been bought by Thy Blood, *for you are bought with a great price*—(1 Cor. vi., 20), it is a sign that Thou lovest them much; and as Thou dost love them, let us pray thus to Thee: *We therefore pray thee to help thy servants, whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.*—(Te Deum). It is true that by my sins I have separated myself from Thee and have knowingly lost Thee. But remember, my Jesus, that Thou hast purchased me with Thy Blood. Ah, may this Blood not have been given in vain for me, which was shed with so much grief and so much love!

By my sins I have driven Thee, my God, from my soul, and have merited Thy hatred; but Thou hast said that Thou wouldst forget the crimes of a repentant sinner. *But if he do penance . . . I will not remember all his iniquities.*—(Ezech. xviii., 21). Thou hast also said, *I love them that love me.*—(Prov. viii., 17). I pray Thee, therefore, my Jesus, to forget all the injuries that I have offered Thee, and love me; whilst I also will

now love Thee more than myself, and repent above all things for having offended Thee. Ah, my beloved Lord, for the sake of that Blood Thou hast shed for the love of me, hate me no longer, but love me. It is not enough for me that Thou shouldst only forgive me the chastisement I deserve, I desire to love Thee and to be loved by Thee. O God, Who art all love, all goodness, unite me and bind me to Thyself, and permit not that I should ever again be separated from Thee and deserve Thy hatred. No, my Jesus, my Love, let it not be, I will be all Thine, and I desire that Thou shouldst be all mine.

II.

He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death; even the death of the cross.—(Phil. ii., 8).

What great thing is it that the Martyrs did in giving their lives for God, while this God humbled himself to the death of the Cross for their love! To render a just return for the death of a God, it would not be sufficient to sacrifice the lives of all men; the death of another God for His love would alone compensate for it. O my Jesus, allow me, a poor sinner, to say to Thee with Thy true lover, St. Francis of Assisi: "May I die, Lord, for the love of Thy love, Who, for the love of my love didst deign to die."

Is it true, my Redeemer, that hitherto, for the love of my own pleasures, I, unhappy that I am, renounced Thy love? Would that I had died before I had ever offended Thee! I thank Thee that Thou givest me time to love Thee in this life that I may afterwards love Thee throughout all eternity. Ah, remind me continually, my Jesus, of the ignominious death Thou hast suffered for me, that I may never forget to love Thee in consideration of the love Thou hast borne me. I love Thee, infinite Goodness; I love Thee, my supreme Good. To Thee I give myself entirely, and by that love which caused Thee to die for me, do Thou accept my love; and let me die, destroy me, rather than ever permit me to leave off loving Thee. I will say to Thee, with St.

Francis de Sales: "O Eternal Love, my soul seeks Thee and chooses Thee for all eternity! Come, O Holy Spirit and inflame our hearts with Thy love. Either to love or to die! To die to all other affections, to live only to the love of Jesus!"

Saturday—Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE IMITATION OF MARY.

Now, therefore, ye children, hear me: Blessed are they that keep my ways . . . Blessed is the man that watcheth daily at my gates.—(Prov. viii., 32, 34).

Blessed is he who, like the poor who stand before the gates of the rich, is careful to seek for the alms of graces before the doors of the mercy of Mary! And thrice blessed is he who moreover seeks to imitate the virtues which he remarks in Mary, and more especially her purity and humility.

I.

St. Augustine says that to obtain with more certainty and in greater abundance the favour of the Saints, we must imitate them; for when they see us practising their virtues, they are moved all the more to pray for us. The Queen of Saints and our principal Advocate, Mary, has no sooner delivered a soul from Lucifer's grasp and united it to God, than she desires that it should begin to imitate her virtues, otherwise she cannot enrich it with the graces that she would wish, seeing it so opposed to her in conduct. Therefore Mary calls those blessed

who with diligence imitate her life: *Now, therefore, ye children, hear me; blessed are they that keep my ways.*

Whosoever loves, resembles the person loved, or endeavours to become like that person, according to the well-known proverb: *Love either finds or makes it like.* Hence St. Sophronius exhorts us, if we love Mary, to endeavour to imitate her, because this is the greatest act of homage we can offer her. "Let the child, then," says St. Bernard, "endeavour to imitate his Mother, if he desires her favour; for Mary seeing herself treated as a Mother will treat him as her child."

O my Mother, I love thee, but I fear I do not love thee as I ought. I know that love makes lovers like to the person loved. If, then, I see myself so unlike thee, it is a mark that I do not love thee. Thou art so pure, and I, defiled with many sins! Thou so humble, and I so proud! Thou so holy and I so wicked. This, then, is what thou hast to do, O Mary, since thou lovest me! Make me like thyself. Thou hast all power to change hearts; take mine and change it. Show the world thou canst do it for those that love thee. Make me thy worthy child.

II.

As the devotion most dear to Mary is to endeavour to imitate her virtues, it would be well, therefore, to propose to ourselves the imitation of some virtue that corresponds to her Festivals. As, for example, on the Feast of her Immaculate Conception, purity of intention; on her Nativity, renewal of spirit and to throw off tepidity; on her Presentation, detachment from something to which we are most attached; on her Annunciation, humility in supporting contempt; on her Visitation, charity towards our neighbour, in giving alms, or at least in praying for sinners; on her Purification, obedience to Superiors. And finally, on the Feast of her Assumption, let us endeavour to detach ourselves from this world, to do all we can to prepare ourselves for death, and regulate each day of our lives as if it were our last.

"Mary was such," says St. Ambrose, "that her life alone was a model for all. . . . Let the virginity and life of Mary be to you as a faithful image in which the form of virtue is resplendent. Thence learn how to live, what to avoid, what to retain."

O Mother of mercy, behold I, the most miserable of all men, have now recourse to Thy compassion in order that thou mayest grant me what I ask. Others may ask bodily health, worldly goods and advantages, but I come, O Lady, to ask thee for that which thou desirest of me and which is most agreeable to thy most holy heart. Thou who wast so humble, obtain for me humility and love of contempt. Thou who wast so patient under the sufferings of this life, obtain for me patience in trials. Thou who wast all filled with the love of God, obtain for me His pure and holy love. Thou who wast all love towards thy neighbour, obtain for me charity towards my neighbour. Thou, in fine, art the most holy of all creatures, O Mary, make me a Saint. Thou canst do all things, O my Mother, my hope, my love, my refuge, my help and my consolation. Amen.

Spiritual Reading.

THE MARTYRS TEACH US PATIENCE, THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER AND THE LOVE OF GOD.

From the *Patience* which the Martyrs displayed during their tortures, *we should learn to suffer with holy resignation the crosses and afflictions of this life.* Poverty, sickness, persecution, contumely, injustice, and all other evils are but trifling when compared with their sufferings. The reflection that it was the will of God that they should suffer for His love, was their only solace. We also in our tribulations should remember the necessity of resignation to the Divine will; and, calling to mind the more grievous sufferings of the

Martyrs, should blush to complain. St. Vincent de Paul used to say : " Conformity to the Divine will is a sovereign remedy for all our trials."

It may be useful here to remark, with St. Augustine, that it is not the *torture* but the *cause* which makes the martyr. Whence St. Thomas teaches that Martyrdom is to suffer death in the exercise of an act of virtue, from which we may infer that not only he who by the hands of the executioner lays down his life for the Faith, but whoever dies in order to comply with the Divine will, and to please God, is a Martyr, since in sacrificing himself to the Divine love he performs an act of the most exalted virtue. We all have to pay the great debt of nature; let us therefore endeavour in holy prayer, to obtain resignation to the Divine will—to receive death and every tribulation in conformity with the dispensations of God's Providence. As often as we perform this act of resignation with sufficient fervour, we may hope to be made partakers of the merits of the Martyrs. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, in reciting the *Gloria Patri, etc.*, in the Office, always bowed her head in the same spirit as she would have done in receiving the stroke of the executioner.

The example of the Martyrs teaches us also to have *immediate recourse to the assistance* of God by earnest supplication, when we feel ourselves disconsolate or weak under affliction. Thus acted the holy Martyrs. As their torture increased they multiplied their prayers and secured the victory. St. Theodore, after a long endurance of his tortures, was stretched upon burning tiles; feeling the pain penetrating to his very heart, he besought the Lord to sweeten his sufferings and so persevered to the end. There have been on the contrary examples of Christians, who, failing to invoke the assistance of the Almighty, have fallen off from the confession of the Faith, and forfeited the glorious crown. An example is found in the Acts of the Martyrs of Japan. An aged man, having been condemned to a protracted Martyrdom, endured the torture for a considerable time, but failing to invoke heavenly aid, denied his Faith a few moments before he expired—a startling warning to

all, that perseverance in prayer in times of temptations and distress is that which alone can assure us the victory.

But the most important lesson that we learn from the Martyrs is to love God : *He who loveth not abideth in death.*—(Jo. iii., 14). We cannot manifest our love of God by a multitude of actions performed for His glory so well as by a willingness to suffer for His sake. St. Gordianus replied to the tyrant who threatened to put him to death if he did not deny the Name of Jesus : " You threaten death ! But my greatest regret is, that I can die only once for Jesus Christ !" In a similar manner St. Procopius exclaimed to the tyrant, who was directing further tortures : " Torment as much as thou wilt, but know that to one who truly loves Jesus Christ, nothing is dearer than to suffer for His sake." " And did the Saints speak thus," asks St. Bernard, " because they were in a state of stupor or insensible to torments ?" No, says the holy Doctor, it was neither stupor nor insensibility, but *their love of Jesus Christ* which caused them to esteem it all joy to suffer and to die for His glory. This ardent love of God is certainly the greatest spiritual advantage to be derived from the perusal of the Acts of the Martyrs ; the recollection of their conduct will make us ashamed to repine under the tribulations Divine Providence sends us, and will strengthen us to receive them with resignation.

Evening Meditation.

" *WHY WILL YOU DIE, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL?*"

I.

St. Paul says that Jesus Christ, by dying for us, was made our justification : *He is made unto us wisdom, and justice, and sanctification, and redemption.*—(1 Cor. i., 30). " Justice," comments St. Bernard, " in the

washing-away of sins." Yes, for God, accepting on our behalf the torments and death of Jesus Christ, is obliged to pardon us by virtue of the compact made : *Him that knew no sin, for us he hath made sin, that we might be made the justice of God in him.*—(2 Cor. v., 21). The innocent One was made a Victim for our sins in order that forgiveness through His merits might of right belong to us. For this reason David prays God to save him, not only for His Mercy's sake, but likewise for the sake of His Justice : *Deliver me in thy justice.*—(Ps. xxx., 2).

The eagerness of God to save sinners was always immense. This eagerness led Him to reproach them with that cry : *Return, ye transgressors, to the heart.* —(Is. xlvi., 8). Sinners, enter once more into your own hearts; think of the benefits you have received from Me, of the love I have borne you, and offend Me no more. *Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you.*—(Zach. i., 3). Return to Me, and I will receive you into my embraces : *Why will you die, O house of Israel? Return ye and live.*—(Ezech. xviii., 31). My children, why will you destroy yourselves, and of your own free-will condemn yourselves to everlasting death ? Return to Me and you shall live.

In a word, His infinite mercy induced Him to descend from Heaven to earth to come and free us from eternal death : *Through the bowels of the mercy of our God, in which the Orient from on high hath visited us.*—(Luke i., 73). But here we must be mindful of what St. Paul says. Previously to God becoming Man He was full of mercy for us; but He could not feel compassion for our miseries, because compassion implies suffering, and God is incapable of suffering. Now, says the Apostle, in order to be moved also with compassion for us the Eternal Word willed to become Man, capable of suffering, and similar to other men who are affected with compassion, so that He might be able not only to save us, but also to compassionate us : *For we have not a High Priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but one tempted in all things like as we are, without sin.*—(Heb.

iv., 15). And in another passage : *It behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful high priest.*—(Heb. ii., 17).

So, then, my Jesus, Thou art my God, and not being able to die as God, Thou hast been pleased to become Man capable of dying in order to give Thy life for me. My sweet Redeemer, how is it that, at the sight of such mercy and love Thou hast shown towards me, I do not die of grief? Thou didst come down from Heaven to seek me, a lost sheep, and how many times have I not driven Thee away, preferring my miserable pleasures before Thee! But since Thou dost wish to have me, I leave all; I wish to be Thine, and I will have none other but Thee.

II.

Oh, what tender compassion Jesus Christ has for poor sinners! This makes Him say He is that Shepherd Who goes about seeking the lost sheep, and on finding it He prepares a feast saying : *Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost. And he lays it upon his shoulders rejoicing*—(Luke xv., 4, 6); and thus He carefully keeps possession of it in His fond embrace for fear He should again lose it. This, too, caused Him to say He is that loving Father Who, whenever a prodigal son that has left Him returns to His feet, does not thrust him away, but embraces him, kisses him, and as it were, faints away for the consolation and fondness which He feels in beholding His repentance : *And running to him, he fell upon his neck and kissed him.*—(Luke xv., 20). This causes Him to say : *I stand at the gate and knock*—(Apoc. iii., 20); that is, although driven away from the soul by sin, He does not abandon her, but He places Himself outside the door of her heart and knocks by His calls to gain re-admittance. Hence He said to His disciples who with indiscreet zeal would have called down vengeance on those who repulsed them : *You know not of what spirit you are.*—(Luke ix., 55). You see I have so much compassion on sinners; and do you desire vengeance on them? You are not of My spirit.

Finally, this compassion made Him say : *Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you.*—(Matt. xi., 28). Come to me, all you that are afflicted and tormented with the weight of your sins, and I will give you peace.

Ah, my Jesus, make me know the evil I have committed, and the love which Thou desirest to have. But since Thou hast borne with me till now, permit me not to give Thee any more cause for sorrow. Inflame me altogether with Thy love, and remind me always of all Thou hast suffered for me, that from this day forth I may forget everything, and think of nothing but loving and pleasing Thee. Thou didst come on earth to reign in our hearts; take, then, from my heart all that could prevent Thee from possessing it entirely. Make my will to be wholly conformed to Thy will; may Thy will be my will, and may it be the rule of all my actions and desires.

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

" BE NOT WISE IN YOUR OWN CONCEITS."

Be not wise in your own conceits.—(Ep. of Sunday. Rom. xii., 16—21).

The wise Christian looks to the future, that is, to the account he must render at the hour of death. Sinners think only of the present, and regard not the end for which they were created. *Oh that they would be wise and would understand and would provide for their last end!*—(Deut. xxxii., 29).

I.

Sinners are foolish; the Saints are truly wise. "A man not truly wise," says St. Bernard, "who is not wise towards himself," that is, by taking special care to secure for himself eternal happiness. Sinners think only of the present, but regard not the end for which they were created. Yet what will it profit them to gain all things if they attain not their last end, which alone can make them happy? *But one thing is necessary.*—(Luke x., 42). To attain our end is the only thing necessary for us: if we fail in that, all is lost. What is this end? *Life everlasting.*—(Rom. vi., 22). During life sinners care but little for the attainment of this end. Each day brings them nearer to death and to eternity; but they know not their destination. Should a pilot who is asked whither he is going, answer that he did not know, would not all, says St. Augustine, cry out that he was bringing the vessel to destruction? The Saint then adds: "Such a one runs well but off the right road."

These are the wise ones of the world who know so well how to acquire wealth and honours, and to indulge in every kind of amusement, but know not how to save their souls. How miserable the rich glutton, who, though able to lay up riches and to live splendidly, was, after death, buried in hell! How miserable Alexander the Great, who, after gaining so many kingdoms, was condemned to eternal torments! How great the folly of Henry the Eighth who rebelled against the Church, but seeing at the hour of death that his soul would be lost, cried out in despair: "Friends, we have lost all!" O God, how many others now weep in hell, and exclaim: *What hath pride profited us? Or what advantages hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow.*—(Wis. v., 8). In the world we cut a great figure; we enjoyed abundant riches and honours; and now all is passed away like a shadow, and nothing remains for us but to suffer and weep for eternity! St. Augustine says that the *happiness* which

sinners enjoy in this life is their *greatest misfortune* for thereby their perverse will, an internal enemy, is strengthened.

In fine, the words of Solomon are fulfilled with regard to all who neglect their salvation : *Mourning taketh hold of the end of joy.*—(Prov. xiv. 13). All their pleasures, honours, and greatness end in eternal sorrow and wailing. *Whilst I was yet beginning he cut me off.*—(Is. xxxviii., 12). Whilst they were laying the foundation of their hopes of realizing a fortune, death comes, and cutting the thread of life, deprives them of all their possessions, and sends them to hell to burn forever in a pit of fire. What greater folly can be conceived than to wish to be transformed from the friend of God into the slave of Lucifer, and from the heir of Paradise to be, by sin, doomed to hell? For the moment a Christian commits a mortal sin, his name is written among the number of the damned! St. Francis de Sales said that if the Angels were capable of weeping, they would do nothing else but shed tears at the sight of the destruction a Christian who commits mortal sin brings upon himself.

Dear Jesus, have pity upon me! I have forgotten Thee, but Thou didst not forget me. O my God, enlighten me and assist me.

II.

Consider how great is the folly of sinners, who, by living in sin, lead even here on earth a life of misery and discontent. All the goods of this world cannot content the heart of man which has been created to love God, and can find no peace out of God. What are all the grandeurs and all the pleasures of this world but *vanity of vanities?*—(Eccles. i., 12). What are they but *vanity and vexation of spirit?*—(Eccles. iv., 16). Earthly goods are, according to Solomon who had experience of them, *vanity of vanities;* that is, mere vanities, lies, and deceits. They are also *a vexation of spirit.* They not only do not content, but they even afflict the soul; and the more abundantly they are possessed, the greater the anguish they produce. Sinners hope to find peace in

their sins; but what peace can they enjoy? *There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord.*—(Is. xlviii., 22). God gives peace to souls who love Him, and not to those who despise Him. Instead of seeking to be the friends of God, sinners wish to be the slaves of Satan who is a cruel and merciless tyrant to all who submit to his yoke. And if he promises delights, he does it, as St. Cyprian says, not for our welfare, but that we may be the companions of his torments in hell.

O my God, permit me not to become any more so blind as to prefer my own unlawful gratifications before Thee. I now detest them and I love Thee above all things. O Mary, my Mother, help me to love Jesus.

Spiritual Reading.

STRONG FAITH AND WEAK FAITH.

Jesus said to them that followed him: Amen, I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel.—(Gospel of Sunday. Matt. viii., 1, 13).

He that loves Jesus Christ believes all His words, and his Faith is most perfect whose love of God is most perfect. Whoever loves a person believes all that proceeds from the lips of that person; consequently the more a soul loves Jesus Christ, the more lively and unshaken is her Faith. When the Good Thief beheld our Redeemer, though He had done no ill, suffering death upon the Cross with such patience, he began at once to love Him; under the influence of this love, and of the Divine light which then broke upon his soul, he believed that this was truly the Son of God, and begged not to be forgotten by Him when He should have passed into His kingdom.

Faith is the foundation of Charity; but Faith afterwards receives her perfection from Charity. His Faith is most perfect whose love of God is most perfect. Charity produces in man not merely the Faith of the

understanding, but the Faith of the will also : those who believe only with the understanding, but not with the will, as is the case with sinners who are perfectly convinced of the Truths of the Faith, but who do not choose to live according to the Divine Commandments,—such as these have a very weak Faith; for had they a more lively belief that the grace of God is a priceless treasure, and that sin, because it robs us of this grace, is the worst of evils, they would assuredly change their lives. If, then, they prefer the miserable creatures of this earth to God, it is because they either do not believe, or because their Faith is very weak. On the contrary, he who believes not only with the understanding, but also with the will, so that he not only believes, but has the will to believe in God, the Revealer of Truth, from the love he has for Him, and rejoices in so believing,—such a one has a perfect Faith, and consequently seeks to make his life conformable to the truths that he believes.

Weakness of Faith, however, in those who live in sin, does not spring from the obscurity of Faith; for though God, in order to make our Faith more meritorious, has veiled the objects of Faith in darkness and secrecy, He has at the same time given us such clear and convincing evidence of their truth, that not to believe them would argue not merely a lack of sense, but sheer madness and impiety. The weakness of the Faith of many persons is to be traced to the *wickedness of living*. He who, rather than forego the enjoyment of forbidden pleasures, scorns the Divine friendship, would wish there were no law to forbid, and no chastisement to punish, his sin; on this account, he strives to blind himself to the Eternal Truths of Death, Judgment, and Hell, and of Divine justice; and because such subjects strike too much terror into his heart, and are too apt to mix bitterness in his cup of pleasure, he sets his brain to work to discover proofs, which have at least the look of plausibility, and by which he allows himself to be flattered into the persuasion that there is neither soul, nor God, nor hell, in order that he may live and die like the brute beasts, without laws and without reason.

And this laxity of morals is the source whence have issued, and still issue daily, so many books and systems of Materialists, Indifferentists, Deists, and Naturalists. Some among them deny the Divine Existence, and some Divine Providence, saying that God, after having created men, takes no further notice of them, and is heedless whether they love or hate Him, whether they be saved or lost; others, again, deny the goodness of God, and maintain that He has created numberless souls for hell, becoming Himself their tempter to sin, that so they may damn themselves, and go into everlasting fire, to curse Him there for ever!

Oh, ingratitude and wickedness of men! God has created them in His mercy, to make them eternally happy in Heaven; He has poured on them so many lights, benefits, and graces, to bring them to Eternal Life; for the same end He has redeemed them at the price of so many sorrows and sufferings; and yet they strive to deny all, that they may give free rein to their vicious inclinations! But no, let them strive as they will, the unhappy beings cannot wrest themselves from remorse of conscience, and the dread of the Divine vengeance. Oh, if they would but once forsake sin, and apply themselves earnestly to the love of Jesus Christ, they would then most certainly cast away all doubts about things of Faith, and firmly believe all the truths that God has revealed!*

The true lover of Jesus Christ keeps the Eternal Truths constantly in view, and orders all his actions according to them. Oh, how thoroughly does he who loves Jesus Christ understand the force of that saying of the Wise Man, *Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity*; that all earthly greatness is mere smoke, dirt and delusion; that the soul's only welfare and happiness consist in loving her Creator, and in doing His blessed will; that we are, in reality, no more than what we are before God; that

* St. Alphonsus published a dogmatic work, *The Truth of the Faith*, in which he clearly showed the folly of all the systems of modern unbelievers.—EDITOR.

it is of no use to gain the whole world, if the soul be lost; that all the goods in the world can never satisfy the human heart, but only God Himself; and, in fine, that we must leave all in order to gain all.

Charity believeth all things.—(1 Cor. xiii., 7). There are other Christians,—though not so perverse as the class we have mentioned, who would fain believe in nothing, that they may give full scope to their unruly passions, and live on undisturbed by the stings of remorse,—there are others, I say, who believe indeed, but their Faith is languid; they believe the most holy Mysteries of Religion, the Truths of Revelation contained in the Gospel,—the Trinity, the Redemption, the holy Sacraments, and the rest; still they do not believe *all*. Jesus Christ has said: *Blessed are the poor; Blessed are they that hunger; Blessed are they that suffer persecution; Blessed are you when men shall revile you and shall say all manner of evil against you.*—(Matt. v., 3—11). This is the teaching of Jesus Christ in the Gospel. How, then, can it be said, that those believe in the Gospel who say: "Blessed are those who have money! Blessed are those who suffer nothing! Blessed are those who can take their amusements; and pitiable is the man that suffers persecution and ill-treatment from others!" We must certainly say of such as these, that either they do not believe the Gospel, or that they believe only *a part of it*. He who believes it all esteems it his highest fortune, and a mark of the Divine favour in this world, to be poor, to be sick, to be mortified, to be despised and ill-treated by men. Such is the belief and such the language of one who believes all that is said in the Gospel and has a real love for Jesus Christ.

Evening Meditation.

THE SAINTS ARE TRULY WISE.

I.

Let us be persuaded that the truly wise are those who know how to love God and to gain Heaven. Happy the man to whom God has given the *science of the Saints.* —Sap. x., 10). Oh, how sublime that science which teaches us to know how to love God and to save our souls! Happy, says St. Augustine, is the man "who knows God, although he may be ignorant of other things." They who know God, the love which He deserves, and how to love Him, stand not in need of any other knowledge. They are wiser than those who are masters of many sciences, but know not how to love God. Brother Egidius of the Order of St. Francis, once said to St. Bonaventure: Happy you, O Father Bonaventure, who are so learned, and who by your learning, can become more holy than I can who am but a poor ignorant man. The Saint replied: "If an old woman loves God more than I do, she is more learned and more holy than I am." At hearing this, Brother Egidius exclaimed: "O poor old woman! Poor old woman! hear what Father Bonaventure says. If you love God more than he does, you can surpass him in sanctity."

It was this excited the emulation of St. Augustine and made him ashamed of himself. He exclaimed: "The ignorant rise up and bear away the kingdom of Heaven," and what are we, the learned ones of this world doing? Oh! how many of the rude and illiterate are saved, who, though they know not how to read, know how to love God, and how many of the wise ones of the world are damned! Oh, truly wise were St. John of God, St. Felix of Cantalicio, and St. Paschal, poor Franciscan lay-brothers, who were unacquainted with human sciences but learned in the *science of the Saints.* But the wonder is, that, though worldlings themselves are

fully persuaded of this truth, and constantly extol the merits of those who retire from the world to live only for God, still they act as if they believed it not.

II.

Tell me, to which class do you wish to belong—to the wise ones of the world, or to the wise ones of God? Before you make a choice, St. John Chrysostom advises you to go to the graves of the dead! Oh, how eloquently do the sepulchres of the dead teach us the science of the Saints and the vanity of all earthly goods! "For my part," says the Saint, "I see nothing but rottenness, bones and worms." Among these skeletons I cannot distinguish the noble, the rich, or the learned; I see that they have all become dust and rottenness. Thus all their greatness and glory have passed away like a dream!

What, then, must we do? Listen to the advice of St. Paul: *This, therefore, I say, brethren: the time is short: it remaineth that . . . they that use this world, as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away.*—(1 Cor. vii., 29, 31). This world is a scene which shall pass away and end very soon: *The time is short.* During the days of life that remain, let us endeavour to live like men who are wise not according to the world, but according to God, by attending to the sanctification of our souls, and by adopting the means of salvation; by avoiding dangerous occasions; by practising prayer; joining some pious Sodality; frequenting the Sacraments; reading every day a spiritual book; and if it be in our power, by daily hearing Mass, or, at least, visiting Jesus in the Holy Sacrament of the altar, and an image of the most holy Mary. Thus we shall be truly wise and be happy for time and for eternity.

Monday—Third Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

LET US HASTEN TO GIVE OURSELVES TO GOD.

To secure a happy death the Saints abandoned all things. They left their country; they renounced the delights and the hopes the world held out to them and embraced a life of Poverty and Contempt. *O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity and seek after lying?*

I.

David calls the happiness of this life *the dream of them that awake.*—(Ps. lxxii., 20). In explaining these words, a certain author says: The goods of this world appear great, but they are nothing: like a dream that lasts but a little and afterwards vanishes, they are enjoyed but a short time. The thought that with death all ends, made St. Francis Borgia resolve to give himself entirely to God. The Saint was obliged to accompany the dead body of the Empress Isabella to Grenada. When the coffin was opened her appearance was so horrible and the smell so intolerable that all had to retire. St. Francis remained to contemplate in the dead body of his sovereign the vanity of the world; and looking at it he exclaimed: "Are you, then, my empress? Are you the queen before whom so many bent their knee in reverential awe? O Isabella, where is your majesty, your beauty gone?" "Thus, then," he said within himself, "end the greatness and the crowns of this world! I will henceforth serve a Master Who can never die!" From that moment he consecrated

himself to the love of Jesus crucified; and he made a vow to become a Religious, should his wife die before him. This vow he afterwards fulfilled by entering the Society of Jesus.

Justly, then, has a person who was undeceived written on a skull these words: *Cogitanti vilescunt omnia.* To him who reflects on death, everything in this world appears contemptible. He cannot love the earth. And why are there so many unhappy lovers of this world? It is because they do not think of death. *O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?*—(Ps. iv., 3). Miserable children of Adam, says the Holy Ghost, why do you not chase away from your heart so many earthly affections which make you love vanity and lies? What has happened to your forefathers must befall you. They dwelt in the same palace which you inhabit, and slept in your very bed; but now they are no more. Such, too, will be your lot.

My dear Redeemer, I thank Thee for having waited for me. What should have become of me had I died when I was at a distance from Thee? May Thy mercy and patience, which I have experienced for so many years, be forever blessed! I thank Thee for the light and grace with which Thou dost now assist me. I did not then love Thee, and I cared but little to be loved by Thee. I now love Thee with my whole heart, and nothing grieves me so much as the thought of having displeased so good a God. This sorrow tortures my soul; but it is a sweet torment, because it gives me confidence that Thou hast already pardoned me.

II.

Give yourself, then, to God before death comes upon you. *Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly.* —(Eccles. ix., 10). What you can do to-day, defer not till to-morrow; for a day once passed never returns, and to-morrow death may come, and prevent you from ever more being able to do good. Detach yourself instantly from everything which removes, or can remove, you from

God. Let us instantly renounce in affection the goods of this earth, before death strips us of them by force. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.*—(Apoc. xiv., 13). Happy they who at death are already dead to all attachment to this world. They fear not, but desire death, and embrace it with joy; for, instead of separating them from the Good they love it unites them to the Supreme Good, Who is the sole object of their affections, and Who will render them happy for eternity.

O my sweet Saviour, would that I had died a thousand times before I sinned against Thee! I tremble lest I should hereafter offend Thee again. Ah! make me die the most painful of all deaths rather than permit me evermore to lose Thy grace. I was once the slave of hell; but now I am Thy servant, O God of my soul! Thou hast said that Thou *lovest those that love thee* —(Prov. viii., 17). I love Thee. Therefore I am Thine and Thou art mine. I may lose Thee at some future time; but the grace which I ask of Thee is, to take me out of life rather than suffer me ever to lose Thee again. Unasked, Thou hast bestowed upon me so many graces; I cannot now fear that Thou wilt not hear my prayer for the grace which I now implore. Do not permit me ever to lose Thee. Give me Thy love, and I desire nothing more. Mary, my hope, intercede for me.

Spiritual Reading.

THE MARTYRS TEACH US TO ACCEPT DEATH ACCORDING TO THE GOOD PLEASURE OF GOD.

PRAYING TO THE HOLY MARTYRS.

Death, which is the tribute that every one must pay, is the greatest of all our tribulations and makes not only sinners but the just tremble. Our Saviour Himself as Man wished to show the fear that He felt in the face of

death, so that He began to pray to His Father to free Him from it. But at the same time He teaches us to accept death according to the good pleasure of God, by saying : *Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.* —(Matt. xxvi., 39). We can all acquire the glory of Martyrdom by accepting death to please God and conform ourselves to His will. For, as we have remarked with St. Augustine, it is not *the pain*, but *the cause* or *the end* for which one submits to death that makes Martyrs. It follows that he who in dying courageously accepts death and all the pains that accompany it, in order to accomplish the Divine will, though he does not receive death at the hands of the executioner, dies, however, with the merit of Martyrdom, or at least with merit very similar. It also follows that as often as any one offers himself to undergo Martyrdom for the love of God, so often does he gain the merit of Martyrdom. We have seen how St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, when she inclined the head at the *Glory be to the Father*, imagined at the same moment she was receiving the stroke of the executioner. Hence we shall see in Heaven a great number of Saints crowned with the merit of Martyrdom without having been martyred.

Finally we should be moved to *recommend ourselves every day with great confidence to the intercession of the holy Martyrs* whose prayers are most efficacious with God. When we suffer some grievous pain, or when we desire a special favour, let us make a Novena or a Triduum in honour of the holy Martyrs, and we shall easily obtain the grace we ask. Let us not fail to honour them, says St. Ambrose, for they are our Princes in the Faith and our powerful intercessors. If the Lord promises a reward to him who gives a drink of water to a poor man, what will He not do for those who for His sake sacrificed their lives in the midst of torments ! Let us here observe that the Martyrs before receiving the mortal blow, without doubt prepared themselves many times for those many tortures and for death, so that when they closed their earthly career they died with the merit of not only one Martyrdom, but with the merit of all those Martyrdoms that they had already accepted and

offered sincerely to God. Hence we may imagine with what abundance of merits they entered Heaven, and how valuable is their mediation with God.

A Prayer to the Holy Martyrs to Obtain their Protection.

O ye blessed Princes of the Heavenly Kingdom! Ye who sacrificed to Almighty God the honours, the riches, and possessions of this life, and have received in return the unfading glory and never-ending joys of Heaven! Ye who are secure in the everlasting possession of the brilliant crown of glory which your sufferings have obtained!—look with compassion upon our wretched state in this valley of tears where we groan in the uncertainty of what may be our eternal destiny. And from that Divine Saviour for Whom you suffered so many torments, and Who now repays you with such unspeakable glory, obtain for us that we may love Him with all our heart, and receive in return the grace of perfect resignation under the trials of this life, fortitude under the temptations of the enemy, and perseverance to the end. May your powerful intercession obtain for us that we may one day in your blessed company sing the praises of the Eternal God and, even as you now do, face to face, enjoy the Beatitude of His vision!

Evening Meditation.

"GOD HIMSELF WILL COME AND SAVE YOU." —(Is. xxxv., 1).

I.

God is that strong One Who alone can be called strong, because He is Strength itself; and whoever is strong derives strength from Him: *Strength is mine, and by me kings reign*—(Prov. viii., 14), says the Lord. God is that mighty One Who can do whatsoever He will;

and He can do this with ease; He has merely to wish it: *Behold, thou hast made heaven and earth by thy great power, and no word shall be hard to thee.*—(Jer. xxxii., 17). By a nod He created the Heavens and earth out of nothing: *He spoke, and they were made.*—(Ps. cxlviii., 5). And did He choose to do so, He could destroy the immense machinery of the universe by a nod, as He created it: *At a beck he can utterly destroy the whole world.*—(2 Mach. viii., 18). We know already how when he pleased, He burnt five entire cities with a deluge of fire. We know how, previously to that, He inundated the whole earth with a Deluge of waters, to the destruction of all mankind, with the sole exception of eight persons. *O Lord*, says the Wise Man: *who shall resist the strength of thy arm?*—(Wis. xi., 22).

Hence we may see the rashness of the sinner who wrestles against God, and carries his audacity so far as even to lift up his hand against the Almighty: *He hath stretched out his hand against God, and hath strengthened himself against the Almighty.*—(Job. xv., 25). Suppose we should see an ant make an assault upon a soldier, would we not think it rashness? But how much more rash is it for a man to make an assault on the Creator Himself, and scorn His Precepts, disregard His threats, despise His grace, and declare himself God's enemy!

O great Son of God, Thou hast become Man in order to make Thyself loved by men; but where, then, is the love that men bear to Thee? Thou hast given Thy Blood and Thy life to save our souls, and why are we so ungrateful to Thee, that, instead of loving Thee, we despise Thee with such ingratitude? Alas! I myself, Lord, have been one of those who more than others have thus ill-treated Thee. But Thy Passion is my hope. Oh, for the sake of the love that induced Thee to assume human flesh, and to die for me upon the Cross, forgive me all the offences I have committed against Thee. I love Thee, O Incarnate Word. I love Thee, O my God.

II.

But these rash and ungrateful ones are the very men whom the Son of God has come to save, by making Himself Man and by taking on Himself the chastisement deserved by them in order to obtain pardon for them. And then, seeing that man from the wounds inflicted by sin continued very weak and powerless to resist the strength of his enemies, what did God do? The Strong and Almighty One became weak and assumed to Himself the bodily infirmities of man, in order to procure for man by His merits the strength of soul requisite to subdue the attacks of the flesh and of hell. And so, behold Him made a little Child in need of milk to sustain His life, and so feeble that He cannot feed Himself or move Himself.

The Eternal Word, in becoming Man, wished to conceal His strength: *God will come from the south; there is his strength hid.*—(Hab. iii., 3, 4). We find, says St. Augustine, Jesus Christ strong and feeble,—strong, since He created all things; feeble, since we behold Him made Man like us: "We find Jesus strong and weak; strong, by Whom all things were made without labour. Would you see Him weak? *The Word was made flesh.*" Now this strong One has chosen to become weak, says the Saint, to repair our infirmity by His weakness, and so to obtain our salvation: *He hath built us up by his strength, he hath sought us by his infirmity.* For this reason He likens Himself to the hen, when He speaks to Jerusalem: *How often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings! And thou wouldst not.*—(Matt. xxiii., 37). St. Augustine remarks that the hen in rearing her chickens grows weak, and by this mark is known to be a mother; so was it with our loving Redeemer, by becoming infirm and weak, He showed Himself the Father and Mother of us poor weak creatures.

I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness, and I repent of all the injuries I have done Thee. Would that I could, for Thy sake, die of sorrow! O my Jesus, grant me the gift of Thy love; let me not live any longer ungrateful

for the affection Thou hast borne me. I am determined to love Thee always. Give me holy perseverance. O Mary, Mother of God, and my Mother, obtain for me from thy Son the grace to love Him always even unto death.

Tuesday—Third Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES
(*January 29th*)
HIS FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY.

They who love God never doubt in matters of Faith. It is only those who do not live according to the dictates of their Faith who doubt its Truths. O my God, cries out St. Francis, the beauty of our holy Faith appears to me so delightful that I could die of love for it!

I.

Great was the Faith of St. Francis de Sales. Such was his delight when he thought of the beauty and excellence of Faith, that he was heard to exclaim, "O my God, the beauty of our holy Faith appears to be so delightful that I could die of love for it, and it seems to me that I ought to enclose this precious gift which God has bestowed upon me, in a heart full of the sweetest perfumes of devotion." Hence he was never satisfied with giving God thanks for having blessed him with the favour of being born a child of the true Church: "O bountiful God," said he, "great indeed are the favours by which Thou hast bound me to Thee; but how shall I ever sufficiently thank Thee for having enlightened me with

the true Faith?" And he declared that, although he had constantly had so much to do with heretics, he had never once doubted in the least of the truth of his Faith. They who love God never doubt in matters of Faith: it is only those who do not live according to the dictates of their Faith who doubt of its Truths.

Great also was the Hope of St. Francis. He was always firmly convinced that God continually watches over our welfare, and hence he was always calm and intrepid in the midst of the greatest dangers. In the very dangers which threatened his designs for the glory of God, he never lost confidence. And this he always endeavoured to instil into others. On one occasion he is related to have said to a timid soul: "Do you desire to belong entirely to God? Why, then, do you fear on account of your weakness? Do you hope in God? And shall he who hopes in God be ever confounded? Be not afraid of your fears." He who loves God much, confides much in Him. Love always cuts out fear.

II.

Great likewise was his love for God. The very fear which he experienced in the early part of his life, that he might not be worthy to love God for all eternity, ruined his health and nearly deprived him of life. It was his great Charity which inspired him to expose himself on so many occasions to death for God's sake. He was so careful to expel from his heart every affection which was not directed towards God, that he said, "If I knew that there existed in my heart a single fibre of affection that is not from God and for God, I would immediately pluck it out." He always aspired to the purest love of God. He said: "I would rather not exist than not be entirely devoted to God." In one of his letters he writes: "My heart is filled with an unbounded desire of being forever sacrificed to the pure love of my Saviour." And he tells us how tender his love was, especially for Jesus Christ, when he says: "Let us contemplate our Divine Redeemer nailed to the Cross and dying upon it for the love of us. Ah! why do we not cast ourselves upon the

same Cross to die on it with Him, for His having been pleased through love for us to die Himself upon it? I will embrace Him and will never leave Him. I will die with Him and will burn in the flames of His love. The same flame shall consume the Divine Creator and His creature. I will live and die upon His bosom. Neither life nor death shall ever separate me from Him."

Holy Saint, since thou art now in Heaven loving Jesus face to face, obtain for me the grace to love Him, as thou didst love Him in thy lifetime.

Spiritual Reading.

THE VARIOUS TORTURES TO WHICH THE MARTYRS WERE SUBJECTED.

The Rev. Faher Mamachi, in his erudite work entitled *Manners and Customs of the First Christians*, gives an account of all those tortures suffered by the Martyrs, from the works of ancient writers who were their contemporaries, as St. Justin, Tertullian, Athenagoras, Origen, Eusebius of Cæsarea, Clement of Alexandria, and others. This author describes at much length the various species of torture employed against the servants of Jesus Christ during the Ten Persecutions of the Roman Emperors. We shall be more brief, as our intention is merely to show how rich in merit were those sainted heroes when they closed their earthly career.

I.—THE MARTYRDOM OF THE CROSS.

Some were crucified in an erect posture, the same as Our Lord Jesus Christ; others with the head downwards, as St. Peter, according to Eusebius, who relates this on the authority of Origen; others in the manner in which the Martyrdom of St. Andrew is represented. Many were made to pass their arms under the transverse beam of the Cross, and had their hands nailed upon the upper part. Some were suspended from a tree by the hands,

their arms having been first tied behind their backs, and heavy weights attached to their feet. Women were hung up by the hair, the agony of which torture was sufficient to cause death; others were hung by one or both feet, with the head downwards, and in many cases a large stone tied round the neck; finally, many had their hands nailed to a beam, with enormous weights at their feet.

II.—THE MARTYRDOM OF FIRE.

Some were placed upon gridirons, others plunged into caldrons of boiling oil or pitch. Many were suffocated with smoke, or dressed in a garment smeared with some combustible matter, and so burned at a stake. Some were cast into fiery furnaces; others were crowded into a ship which was set on fire at sea; others were inclosed in a brazen bull and roasted alive; others again were tortured by red-hot plates of iron applied to their sides; and in fine, were thrown upon the earth, and molten lead poured over them, or were impaled upon a spit and roasted before a slow fire.

III.—THE TORTURE OF THE SCOURGE.

Scourges were of various kinds—of leather, of cane, of the tendons of oxen, of iron links, and sometimes of rods of iron, shaped like thorns, which were called *scorpions*. The Martyrs were generally tied to a post, or between four posts, to increase their punishment; but some were placed in a kind of stock. This stock consisted of two large pieces of wood, one above the other, between which the feet of the sufferers were confined, and in this torture they were sometimes scourged; and others were thrown with their backs on a table filled with large nails, and then scourged with sticks or rods.

IV.—THE TORTURE OF IRONS.

These were iron hooks on which the Christians were suspended, and iron claws that served to tear them to the bone and to their very entrails. Other instruments were destined to pull out all their teeth, one after the other. Their flesh was lacerated with iron combs, or

they were flayed. They were tied to the ground and were cut with blows of the hatchet, or their members were gradually cut to pieces, from the toes to their thighs, and from the fingers to the breasts, so that nothing was left but the trunk. They were stretched with their backs against a wheel that dragged them over sharp irons fixed in the ground; or they were tied upon a table, then disembowelled and their intestines taken out.

V.—OTHER TORTURES.

The Martyrs were also tortured on the rack and with other torments. Sometimes they were exposed to the sun, their bodies being rubbed with honey that they might be stung by the flies and wasps. They were stoned, beheaded, strangled, drowned. There were some who were tied to two trees that had been bent by main force, which when released would tear them asunder. Others tied in a bag were thrown into the sea, or thrown to the dogs or wild beasts. Some were made to die under the press; others perished from hunger.

In some of our narrations the reader may find himself at a loss to account for such barbarity and fierceness as the tyrants practised upon the Martyrs, whose innocence and meekness might be expected to save them from persecution. Let us consider whence this fury came.

It at first originated in the hatred which the pagans bore towards Christians whose virtues were the strongest censure upon their infamous lives.

It was also caused by the instigation of the devils who vehemently abhorred these pious athletes, the more their example served to propagate the Faith and induce others to imitate them.

The principal reason of the persecution was the hatred that those tyrants conceived against the Martyrs at seeing themselves overcome by children, by tender virgins, by simple and ignorant men, who upbraided them with their insanity in following a false religion which authorized every vice and called upon them to worship

as gods men who, during their lives, had given the most horrid examples of turpitude and crime that ever disgraced human nature.

Their rage was yet more increased at the sight of the very many miracles wrought through the servants of the true God. They saw wild beasts cast themselves at the feet of the Martyrs; they perceived that red-hot coals, molten lead, did not burn them, and witnessed other similar prodigies. In vain did they cry out: "This is magic; these are incantations." The people were converted in the presence of these miracles, and thousands of them embraced the Faith, and this redoubled the irritation of the judges.

They believed that they were frightening the Christians by inventing new tortures, and flattered themselves that they were extinguishing the Faith by putting all the Christians to death. But the more they multiplied tortures, and immolated victims, the more did the number of the faithful increase. Tertullian relates that a certain governor in Asia, named Arrius, was putting to death those who confessed the Name of the Lord Jesus, when such a multitude presented themselves before his tribunal as caused him to shudder at the thought of shedding so much blood; he therefore contented himself with putting a few of them to death, and to the rest he said: "If your desire of death be so irresistible, there are precipices enough from which to fling yourselves. Begone!"

Evening Meditation.

JESUS EMBRACED AFFLICTIONS FOR OUR SAKE.

I.

The Apostle, St. Paul, speaking of the Divine Beatitude, calls God the only happy, the only powerful One: *The blessed and only mighty.*—(1 Tim. vi. 15). And with reason, because all the happiness which can

be enjoyed by us, His creatures, is nothing more than the smallest participation in the infinite happiness of God.

God in creating man at the beginning did not place him on earth to suffer, but put him in *the paradise of pleasure*.—(Gen. ii., 15). He put man in a place of delights in order that he might pass thence to Heaven where he should enjoy for all eternity the glory of the Blessed. But by sin unhappy man made himself unworthy of the earthly, and closed against himself the gates of the heavenly, Paradise, wilfully condemning himself to death and everlasting misery. But in order to rescue man from such a state of ruin, what did the Son of God do? From being blessed and happy as He was He chose to become afflicted and tormented. He made a choice on earth of a life of toil and ignominies. Our Lord revealed to St. Margaret of Cortona that in His whole life He never experienced the smallest degree of sensible consolation : *Great as the sea is thy destruction*.—(Lam. ii., 13). The life of Jesus Christ was bitter as the sea, which is thoroughly bitter and salt, and contains not one drop of sweet water. And therefore Isaias rightly calls Jesus Christ *a Man of sorrows*—(Is. liii., 3), as though He had been capable on this earth of nothing but anguish and sorrow. St. Thomas says that the Redeemer did not simply take sorrow on Himself, but that "He endured sorrow in its highest degree"; whereby He would signify that He chose to be the most afflicted Man that had ever been upon earth, or should ever be hereafter.

He comes forth, then, from the prison of His Mother's womb, but for what? Is it perhaps to enjoy Himself? He comes forth to fresh suffering, for He chose to be born in the depth of Winter in a cavern where beasts find stabling, and at the hour of midnight. And He is born in such poverty that He has no fire to warm Him, nor clothes enough to screen Him from the cold. "A grand pulpit is that manger," says St. Thomas of Villanova. Oh, how well does Jesus teach us the love of suffering in the grotto of Bethlehem!

II.

"In the stable," adds Salmeron, "all is vile to the sight, unpleasant to the hearing, offensive to the smell, hard and revolting to the touch." Everything in the stable is painful: everything is painful to the sight, for one sees nothing but rugged and dark rocks; everything is painful to the hearing, for He hears only the cries of brute beasts; everything is painful to the smell, from the stench of the litter that is scattered around; and everything is painful to the touch, for His cradle is only a narrow manger, and His bed only a handful of straw. Look on this Infant God, how He lies bound up in swaddling clothes, so that He cannot stir. "God endures," said St. Zeno, "to be bound in swaddling-clothes, because He had come to pay the debts of the whole world." And hereupon St. Augustine remarks, "O Blessed rags, with which we wipe away the uncleanness of sins!" Observe Him how He trembles with cold; how He weeps, to let us know that He suffers, and offers to the Eternal Father those first tears to release us from that endless wailing which we had deserved! "Blessed tears," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "which blot out our iniquities!" O tears for us most blessed, since they obtain for us the pardon of our sins!

And thus did the life of Jesus Christ continue always in affliction and sorrow. But a short time after He was born He was obliged to fly as an exile into Egypt to escape death at the hands of Herod. Then, in that barbarous country He passed many years of His childhood poor and unknown. Nor was the life which He led on His return from Egypt, dwelling at Nazareth, very different up to the time when He suffered death at the hands of the executioners on the Cross in a sea of sorrows and infamy.

O Jesus, my Saviour, I praise Thee, I thank Thee and I love Thee. I love Thee above all things; I love Thee more than myself; I love Thee with all my soul and I give myself all to Thee. Most holy Mary, my refuge and my consolation, recommend me to thy Son.

Wednesday Third Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

SAD STATE OF THE WORLDLING AT DEATH.

What will be the feelings of the worldling when he is told that death is at hand? What pain will he feel in hearing these words: Your illness is mortal. It is necessary to receive the Last Sacraments, to unite yourself to God, to prepare to bid farewell to the world. What! exclaims the sick man, must I leave all? Yes, you must leave all! *Thou shalt die and not live!*

I.

Imagine yourself at the bedside of a negligent Christian who is overpowered by sickness, and has but a few hours to live. Behold him oppressed by pains, by swoons, by suffocation, want of breath and cold perspirations; his reason so impaired that he feels but little, understands little, and can speak but little. The greatest of all his miseries is, that though at the point of death, instead of thinking of his soul and of preparing accounts for eternity, he fixes all his thoughts on physicians, on the remedies by which he may be rescued from the sickness and the pains which will soon put an end to life. "They are unable to have any other thought than of themselves," says St. Laurence Justinian, speaking of the condition of negligent Christians at the hour of death. Surely his relatives and friends will admonish the dying Christian of his danger? No; there is not one among all his relatives and friends who has the courage to announce to him the news of death, and to advise him to receive the Last Sacraments. Through fear of offending him, they all refuse to inform him of his danger.—

O my God! from this moment I thank Thee, that at death I shall, through Thy grace, be assisted by my beloved brothers of my Congregation, who will then have no other interest that that of my eternal salvation, and will all help me to die well.

But though he is not admonished of his approaching end, the poor sick man, seeing the family in disorder, the medical consultations repeated, the remedies multiplied, and frequent and violent, is filled with confusion and terror. Assaulted by fears, remorse and distrust, he says within himself: Perhaps the end of my days has arrived! But what will be his feelings when at last he is told that death is at hand? *Take order with thy house; for thou shalt die and shalt not live.*—(Is. xxxviii., 1). What pain will he feel in hearing these words: Your illness is mortal. It is necessary to receive the Last Sacraments, to unite yourself to God, and to prepare to bid farewell to this world. What! exclaims the sick man; must I take leave of all—of my house, my villa, my relatives, friends, conversations, games and amusements? Yes, you must take leave of all. The lawyer is already come, and writes this last farewell: "I bequeath." And what does he take away with him? Nothing but a miserable rag, which will soon rot with him in the grave.

If it were at this moment announced to me, O Lord, that my death was at hand, such would be the painful sentiments that would torture my soul. I thank Thee for giving me this light, and for giving me time to enter into myself. O my God, I will no longer fly from Thee. Thou hast sought after me long enough. I have just reason to fear that Thou wilt abandon me, if I now refuse to give myself to Thee, and continue to resist Thy calls. Thou hast given me a heart to love Thee, and I have made so bad a use of it. I have loved creatures and have not loved Thee, my Creator and Redeemer Who hast given Thy life for the love of me. Instead of loving Thee, how often have I offended, how often have I despised Thee, and turned my back upon Thee? I knew that by such a sin I insulted Thee, and still I committed it. My Jesus, I am sorry for all my sins.

II.

Oh, with what melancholy and agitation will the dying man be seized at the sight of the tears of servants, at the silence of his friends, who have not courage to speak in his presence. But his greatest anguish will arise from the remorse of his conscience, which in that tempest will be rendered more terrible by the remembrance of the disorderly life he has until then led, in spite of so many calls and lights from God, of so many admonitions from Spiritual Fathers, and of so many resolutions, made, but never executed, or afterwards neglected. He will then say: O unhappy me! I have had so many lights from God, so much time to settle my conscience, and have not done so. Behold, I have now arrived at the gate of death. What would it have cost me to have avoided such an occasion of sin, to have broken off such a friendship, to have frequented the Tribunal of Penance? Ah, so very little! But, though it should have cost me much pain and labour, I ought to have submitted to every inconvenience to save my soul, which is of more importance to me than all the goods of this world. Oh, if I had put into execution the good resolutions I made on such an occasion! If I had continued the good works which I began at such a time, how happy I should now feel! But these things I have not done, and now there is no more time to do them. The sentiments of dying sinners who have neglected the care of their souls during life, are like those of the damned who mourn in hell over their sins as the cause of their sufferings, but mourn without fruit and without remedy.

O my Jesus, I wish to change my life. I renounce all the pleasures of the world in order to love and please Thee, O God of my soul. Thou hast given me strong proofs of Thy love. I too would wish before death to give Thee some proofs of my love. From this moment I accept all the infirmities, crosses, insults, and offences which I shall receive from men. Give me strength to submit to them with peace. I wish to bear them all for the love of Thee. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness! I

love Thee above every good. Increase my love, give me holy perseverance. Mary my hope, pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading.

SENTIMENTS OF A LIVELY FAITH.

O ye atheists who believe not in God, fools that you are! If you do not believe that there is a God, tell me who created you? How can you imagine that there are creatures existing, without a previous Power having created them? This world which you admire, governed as it is in so beautiful and constant an order,—could chance, which has neither order nor mind, ever have made it?

Poor wretches! you try to persuade yourselves that the soul dies like the body; but, O God, what will you say, when in the next world you find that your souls are immortal, and that throughout eternity you will be unable to repair the ruin you have brought upon yourselves?

But if you believe that there is a God, you must also believe that there is a True Religion. And if you do not believe that the Religion of the Roman Catholic Church is the true one, tell me which is the true one? Perhaps that of the Pagans who admit many gods, and so destroy and deny all of them? Perhaps that of the Mahometans, which is a mixture of fables and follies and contradictions—a religion invented by an infamous impostor, and framed rather for beasts than for men? Perhaps that of the Jews? They, indeed, had at one time the true Faith, but because they rejected their Redeemer Who taught the New Law of grace, they lost their Faith, their country, and all. Perhaps of those heretics who, separating themselves from our Church (which was founded by Jesus Christ, and to which He promised that it should never fail) have confused all revealed dogmas in such a way that the belief of each contradicts that of his neighbour.

Ah! it is most evident that our Faith is the only true one. Either there is Faith, and, then, there can be no other true Religion but ours; or, there is no true Faith, and then all religions are false. But this cannot be; for as there is a God, there must be a true Faith and a true Religion.

But what much greater fools are those Christians who hold the true Faith and live as if they did not believe it! They believe that there is a God, a just Judge, that there is a Paradise and an eternal hell; and yet they live as if there were no Judgment, no Heaven, no hell, no Eternity, no God!

O God, how can Christians believe in Jesus Christ, believe in a God born in a stable; a God living in obscurity in a shop for thirty years and working for His livelihood every day as a simple servant; in fine, how can they believe in a God nailed on a Cross, and dying, consumed with grief; and not only not love Him, but even make a mockery of Him by their sins!

O holy Faith, enlighten all those poor blind creatures who run to eternal perdition! But this light does ever shine forth and enlighten all men, both the faithful and unbelievers: *True light, which enlighteneth every man.* —(Jo. i., 9). How is it, then, that so many are lost? O cursed sin, thou dost blind the minds of so many poor souls, who open their eyes only when they enter eternity! But then they can no more remedy their error!

How is it, my Jesus, that so many of Thy servants have shut themselves up in caves and deserts, to attend only to their salvation; so many nobles and even princes have retired to the cloister, in order to live in poverty and unknown to the world, to make sure of their eternal salvation; so many Martyrs have left all; so many tender virgins have renounced marriage with the highest nobles of the earth, and have embraced such torments as the rack; have braved the axe, the coat of fiery mail, the red-hot gridirons, and the most cruel deaths, rather than lose Thy grace, while so many others live in sin and far from Thee for months and years!

I thank Thee, my Jesus, for the light Thou givest me, by which Thou makest me know that the goods of this world are but smoke, filth, vanity and deceit, and that Thou art the true and only Good.

My God, I thank Thee that Thou hast given me this Faith, and that Thou hast made it so clear to us by the fulfilment of Prophecies, by the truth of miracles, by the constancy of Martyrs, by the sanctity of the doctrine, and by the wonderful propagation of the same throughout the world; so that if it were not true, it would be impossible not to say that Thou hast deceived us, in proving it to us by the numerous testimonies that Thou hast given us of it.

I believe all that the Church teaches me to believe, because Thou hast revealed it. Nor do I pretend to comprehend intellectually those Mysteries which are above my mind; it is enough that Thou hast said so. I pray Thee to increase Thy Faith in me. *Adauge nobis fidem!*—(Luke xvii. 5).

Evening Meditation.

THE INGRATITUDE OF MEN MADE JESUS SUFFER MOST.

I.

We must also well understand here that the pains which Jesus Christ endured in His Passion, in the scourging and the crowning with thorns, in the Crucifixion, His agony and death, and in all the other torments and ignominies which He suffered at the end of His life, He also suffered from the beginning. From the beginning of His life He had always before His eyes the sad vision of all the torments He would have to suffer when about to leave this earth, as He predicted by the mouth of David: *My sorrow is continually before me.*—(Ps. xxxvii., 18). We hide from the sick man the knife or the fire with which he is to be cut or cauterized in order to

regain his health; but Jesus would not have the Instruments of His Passion, by which He was to lose His life that He might gain for us eternal life, hidden from His sight. He desired always to have before His eyes the scourge, the thorns, the nails, the Cross, which were to drain all the Blood from His veins, till He died of pure grief, deprived of all consolation.

One day Jesus Christ crucified appeared to Sister Magdalen Orisini who had been suffering a heavy affliction for a long time, to comfort her by the remembrance of His Passion, and to animate her to bear her cross with patience. She said to Him: "But Thou, my Lord, wast only Three Hours on the Cross, while I have suffered this pain for many years." Then our Lord from the Cross replied: "Ignorant creature that thou art! from the first moment that I was in the womb of Mary I suffered all that I had afterwards to suffer in my death." "Christ," says Novarinus, "even in the womb of His Mother, had the impression of the Cross on His mind; so that no sooner was He born than He might be said to have the *principality on his shoulders*.—(Is. ix., 6)." So, then, my Redeemer, throughout Thy whole life I shall find Thee nowhere but on the Cross. Lord, I find Thee nowhere but on the Cross! Yes, for the Cross on which Jesus Christ died was ever in His mind to torment Him. Even while sleeping, says Bellarmine, the sight of the Cross was present to the Heart of Jesus: "Christ had His Cross always before His eyes. When He slept, His Heart watched; nor was it ever free from the vision of the Cross."

II.

It was, however, not so much the sorrows of His Passion that saddened and embittered the life of our Redeemer, as the sight of all the sins men would commit after His death. These were the cruel executioners which made Him live in continual agony, oppressed by such an overwhelming grief that it alone would have been enough to make Him die of pure sorrow. Father Lessius

says that the sight alone of the ingratitude of mankind would have been sufficient to make Jesus Christ die of grief a thousand times.

The scourges, the Cross, death itself, were not hateful objects to Him, but most dear, chosen and desired by Himself. He had offered Himself spontaneously to suffer them : *He was offered because it was his own will.*—(Is. liii., 7). He did not give His life against His will, but by His own election, as He tells us by St. John : *I lay down my life for my sheep.*—(Jo. x., 15). This was indeed the chief desire of His whole life, that the time of His Passion should arrive, so that the Redemption of mankind might be completed. For this reason He said on the night preceding His death : *With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you before I suffer.*—(Luke xxii., 15). And before this time arrived He seemed to console Himself by saying, *I have a baptism, wherewith I am to be baptised; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!*—(Luke xii., 50). I must be baptized with the Baptism of My own Blood, not indeed to wash My own soul, but those of my sheep, from the stains of their sin; and how ardently do I desire the arrival of the hour when I shall be bleeding and dead on the Cross! St. Ambrose says that the Redeemer was not affected "by the fear of death, but by the delay of our Redemption." St. Zeno tells us Jesus Christ chose for Himself the trade of a carpenter in this world : *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?*—(Mark vi., 3), because as carpenters are always handling wood and nails, it would seem that Jesus exercising this trade took pleasure in such things, seeing that they represented to Him better than anything else the Nails and the Cross by which He willed to suffer.

Thus we see it was not so much the thought of His Passion that afflicted the Heart of our Redeemer, as the ingratitude with which mankind would repay His love. It was this ingratitude which made Him weep in the Stable of Bethlehem; which caused Him to sweat Blood in His deadly agony in the Garden of Gethsemane; which filled Him with such sorrow that He says even

that it alone was sufficient to make Him die : *My soul is sorrowful even to death*—(Matt. xxvi., 38), and, finally, this ingratitude it was which caused Him to die in desolation on the Cross.

Thursday—Third Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

"THE DESIRE OF THE WICKED SHALL PERISH."

How ardently shall we desire at death the time we have squandered away! This being true, our folly and misfortune will be all the greater, if after knowing these things during life, we neglect to apply a remedy in time.

I.

Oh, how clearly are the Truths of Faith seen at the hour of death! But then they only serve to increase the anguish of the dying Christian who has led a bad life, particularly if he has been consecrated to God, and has had greater facilities for serving Him, more time for exercises of piety, more good example and more inspirations. O God, what torture will he feel in thinking : *I have admonished others, and my life has been worse than theirs! I have left the world, and yet have cherished attachment to worldly pleasures and vanities!* What remorse will he feel in thinking that with the lights he had received from God a very pagan would become a Saint! With what pain will his soul be racked when he remembers that he ridiculed in others certain practices of piety, as if they were weaknesses of mind; and that he praised certain worldly maxims of self-esteem,

or of self-love, such as : We should seek our own advancement; We ought to avoid suffering, and indulge in the amusements within our reach.

The desire of the wicked shall perish.—(Ps. cxi., 10). How ardently shall we desire at death the time we now squander away! In his *Dialogues*, St. Gregory relates that a certain rich man called Crisorius who had led a wicked life, seeing at death the devils come to carry him off, exclaimed : Give me time! Give me time until to-morrow! They replied : O fool! Do you now ask for time? You have had so much time, but you wasted it and spent it in committing sin! And now you seek for time! Time is now no more! The unhappy man continued to cry out and call for assistance. To his son Maximus, a monk, who was present, he said : O my son, assist me! O Maximus, come to my aid! With his face all on fire he flung himself furiously from side to side in his bed, and in that state of agitation and screaming aloud, like one in despair, he breathed forth his unhappy soul.

O my God, I will no longer abuse Thy mercy. I thank Thee for the light Thou now givest me, and I promise to change my life. I see that Thou canst not bear with me any longer. I will not wait till Thou send me to hell or abandon me to a wicked life, which would be a greater punishment than death itself. Behold, I cast myself at Thy feet; receive me into Thy favour. I do not deserve Thy grace; but Thou hast said : *The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him, in whatsoever day he shall turn from his wickedness.*—(Exech. xxxiii., 12). If, then, O my Jesus, I have hitherto offended Thy infinite goodness, I now repent with my whole heart and hope for pardon. I will say with St. Anselm : Ah, since Thou hast redeemed me by Thy Blood, do not permit me to be lost on account of my sins. Look not on my ingratitude, but have regard to the love which made Thee die for me. If I have lost Thy grace, Thou hast not lost the power of restoring it to me.

II.

Alas! during life, these fools love their folly; but at death they open their eyes, and confess that they have been fools. But this only serves to increase their fear of repairing past evils; and dying in this state, they leave their salvation very uncertain. You who are now reading this—I imagine that you say: This is indeed true. But if this is true, then your folly and misfortune will be still greater, if after knowing these truths during life, you neglect to apply a remedy in time. This very point which you have read will be at death a sword of sorrow for you.

Since, therefore, you now have time to avoid a death so full of terror, begin instantly to repair the past. Do not wait for the time in which you can make little preparation for Judgment. Do not wait for another month, nor for another week. Perhaps this light which God in His mercy gives you now may be the last light and the last call for you. It is folly to be unwilling to think of death, which is certain, and on which eternity depends; but it would be still greater folly to reflect on it, and not prepare for Judgment. Make now the reflections and resolutions which you would then make. They may be made now with profit—then without fruit: now with confidence that you will save your soul—then, with diffidence of your salvation. A genteman who was about to take leave of the court of Charles the Fifth, to live only for God, was asked by the emperor why he thought of quitting the court. The gentleman answered: To secure salvation it is necessary that some time in penitential works should intervene between a disorderly life and a happy death.

Have mercy on me, then, O my Redeemer. Pardon me, and give me grace to love Thee, for I purpose henceforth to love nothing but Thee. Among so many possible creatures Thou hast chosen me to love Thee. I make choice of Thee, O Sovereign Good, to love Thee above every good. Thou goest before me with Thy Cross; I am willing to follow Thee with the cross Thou wilt give me to carry. I embrace every mortification

and every pain which shall come from Thee. Do not deprive me of Thy grace and I am content. Mary, my hope, obtain for me from God perseverance and the grace to love Him, and I ask for nothing more.

Spiritual Reading.

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH.

1.—ST. GORDIUS, CENTURION.

(January 3).

St. Gordius who was born in the Third Century, followed the military profession, and obtained the rank of centurion, or captain. St. Basil the Great, who wrote a homily in praise of this Saint, relates that at the time of his Martyrdom there was a great persecution of the Christians at Cæsarea. In the public squares idols of wood and stone were exposed, and those who refused to sacrifice to them were tortured and put to death. The consternation of the faithful was very great, for their houses were, with impunity, sacked by the idolaters, the prisons filled with Christians, and while the churches were deserted, the woods and mountains were peopled with the fugitives.

Hereupon St. Gordius renounced his profession, laid aside the military insignia, and retired to the desert to unite himself to God by holy prayer and penitential practices. He casually heard that on a certain day public games were about to be celebrated at Cæsarea in honour of Mars. He accordingly proceeded to the city, and beheld there a great concourse, not only of Gentiles, but of Christians, who, weak in Faith, were not ashamed to assist in these diabolical festivities. The Saint, inspired by the Holy Ghost, proceeded to glorify the Christian Religion, and to reprobate that of the pagans who adored and sacrificed to false gods.

The Gentiles, at this interruption of the games, shouted that the Saint should be put to death for his temerity. They seized upon him, therefore, and led him to the governor, accusing him of all that he had said. The governor, knowing that he had retired to the mountains, asked him why he had fled and afterwards returned. St. Gordius replied: "I have returned, because I am anxious to die for Jesus Christ; and knowing thee to be the most cruel of men, I thought that this afforded me the best opportunity of satisfying my desire."

The tyrant hearing him speak thus, ordered the executioners to prepare their tortures. The Saint, nothing daunted, fervently offered himself to Jesus Christ, and implored strength to suffer for His sake. Scourges, the rack, and fire were used to shake the constancy of the holy Martyr, but he said: "Torture me as much as thou pleasest; the more excruciating my agony the greater my reward in Heaven; for the wounds which now cover my body, I shall there be covered with a garment of glory; and by the pains which now afflict me, I shall earn everlasting joy."

The governor, perceiving that he could not conquer him by these cruel tortures, endeavoured to gain him over by promises of riches and honours; but the Saint answered: "Thou art deceived if thou thinkest that I will barter the joys of Heaven for the miserable advantages this world can afford." Finally, the judge perceiving that promises were as ineffectual as threats, pronounced upon him the sentence of death.

While the Saint was proceeding to the place of execution, his friends exhorted him to yield, for the present, to the wishes of the governor, and not perish thus miserably in his youth. The Saint replied: "Weep not for me but for those who persecute the faithful, since for them eternal fire is prepared; for my part, I am prepared to die, not once, but a thousand times, for Jesus Christ." They urged that, to avoid death, he might deny Jesus Christ with his tongue though he continued to adore Him in his heart. The Saint said: "Far be it from me to deny my God with that tongue which He Himself hath given me."

He then armed himself with the Sign of the Cross and went boldly to encounter death which, according to St. Bazil, was that by fire, in which he gloriously consummated his Martyrdom.

Evening Meditation.

CARRYING OUR CROSS FOR CHRIST WILL MAKE UP FOR ALL.

I.

By our sins we also contributed to embitter with affliction the whole life of our Saviour. But let us thank His goodness in giving us time to remedy the evil which has been done.

How, then, are we to remedy it? By bearing patiently all the crosses which He sends us for our good. And He Himself tells us how we can bear these troubles with patience: *Put me as a seal upon thy heart.* (Cant. viii., 6). Put upon thy heart the image of Christ crucified. That is to say: Consider My example and the pains which I have suffered for thee, and so shalt thou bear all crosses in peace. St. Augustine says that this heavenly Physician made Himself weak, that He might heal our weakness by His own infirmity. "Wondrous medicine! The Physician deigns to become sick, to heal His patient by His own infirmity," according to that which Isaias spoke: *By his bruises we are healed.* —(Is. liii., 5). To heal our souls, which are weakened by sin, the medicine of suffering is the one necessary remedy, and Jesus Christ desired to be the first to taste it, that we who are the true sinners should not refuse to take it also: "The Physician drinks first, that the sick man also may not hesitate to drink."

Believing this, says St. Epiphanius, as true followers of Jesus Christ, we ought to thank Him when He sends us crosses: "It is a virtue peculiar to a Christian to

give thanks when in adversity." And this is reasonable, because by sending us crosses He makes us like to Himself. St. John Chrysostom makes an observation which is very consoling. He says that when we "thank God for His benefits, we do but give Him that which we owe Him; but that when we suffer some pain with patience for His love, then God in a certain way becomes our debtor: "If you thank God for good things you pay a debt; if you thank Him for evil things, you make Him your debtor."

II.

If thou wouldst render love to Jesus Christ, says St. Bernard, learn from Him how thou must love Him: "Learn from Christ how to love Christ." Be happy to suffer something for that God Who has suffered so much for thee. The desire of pleasing Jesus Christ, and of making known to Him the love they bore Him, was that which rendered the Saints hungry and thirsty, not for honours and pleasures but for sufferings and contempt. *God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*—(Gal. vi., 14), said St. Paul. St. Teresa used to say: "Either to suffer or to die!" And St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi: "To suffer and not to die!" And the Venerable Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, a Sicilian nun, was so enamoured of suffering that she went so far as to say: "Truly Paradise is beautiful, but one thing is wanting—*there is no suffering there.*"

If we have not the generosity to desire and seek for sufferings, let us at least try to accept with patience those tribulations which God sends us for our good.

And when God sends us crosses, not only let us be resigned, but let us also thank Him, since it is a sign that He means to pardon our sins, and save us from hell which we have deserved. He who has offended God must be punished, and therefore we ought always to beg of Him to chastise us in this world, and not in the next. That sinner is to be pitied who does not receive his chastisement in this life, but, on the contrary, is prosperous. May God preserve us from that mercy of which Isaias

speaks : *Let us have pity on the wicked.*—(Is. xxvi., 10). "I do not want this mercy," says St. Bernard; "such pity is worse than any anger." O Lord, I do not desire this kind of mercy, for it is more terrible than any chastisement. When God does not punish a sinner in this life, it is a sign that He waits to punish him in eternity, where the punishment will have no end.

From the price thy Redeemer had to pay learn the value of His gifts and the gravity of sin, says St. Laurence Justinian. When we see a God dead on the Cross, we ought to consider the great gift He has made us in giving us His Blood to redeem us from hell, and at the same time to understand the malice of sin, which made the death of a God necessary to obtain pardon for us. O Eternal God, nothing terrifies me more than to see Thy Son punished by so cruel a death on account of sin!

Friday—Third Week after Epiphany

(For First Friday of February)

Morning Meditation.

"MY SOUL IS SORROWFUL UNTO DEATH."

The grief of the Heart of Jesus came, not on account of the torments He saw He should have to suffer, but from seeing the sins men would commit after His death. It was the sight of my sins that oppressed Thy Heart, O Jesus, and made Thee agonize and sweat Blood. This is the recompense I have made Thee!

I.

My soul is sorrowful even unto death.—(Matt. xxvi., 38). These were the words that proceeded from the sorrowful Heart of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemani before He went to die. Alas, whence came this extreme grief of His, which was so great that it was enough to take away His life? Perhaps it was on account of the torments that He saw He would have to suffer? No, for He had foreseen these torments from the time of His Incarnation. He had foreseen them, and had accepted them of His own free will: *He was offered because it was his own will.*—(Is. liii., 7). His grief came from seeing the sins men would commit after His death. It was then, according to St. Bernardine of Sienna, that He saw clearly each particular sin of each one of us. He had regard to every individual sin.

It was not, then, my Jesus, the sight of the scourges, of the thorns, and of the Cross which so afflicted Thee in the Garden of Gethsemani,—it was the sight of my sins! Each one of them so oppressed Thy Heart with grief and sadness that it made Thee agonize and sweat Blood. This is the recompense I have made Thee for the love Thou hast shown me by dying for me. Ah, let me share the grief Thou didst feel in the Garden for my sins, so that the remembrance of it may make me sorrowful all my life. Ah, my sweet Redeemer, if I could but console Thee as much now by my grief and love as I then afflicted Thee! I repent, my Love, with all my heart for having preferred my own miserable satisfaction to Thee. I am sorry and I love Thee above all things. Although I have despised Thee, yet I hear Thee ask for my love. Thou wouldst have me love Thee with all my heart: *Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul.*—(Matt. xxii., 37). Yes, my God, I love Thee with all my heart, I love Thee with all my soul. Do Thou give me the love Thou requirest of me. If I have hitherto sought myself, I will now seek none but Thee. And seeing that Thou hast loved me more than others, more than others will I love Thee. Draw me always more and more, my Jesus, to Thy love by the

odour of Thine ointments, which are the loving attractions of Thy grace. Finally, give me strength to correspond to so much love which God has borne to an ungrateful worm and traitor. Mary, Mother of Mercy, help me by thy prayers.

II.

Neither by the blood of goats or of calves, but by his own blood, entered once into the Holies, having obtained eternal redemption.—(Heb. ix., 12).

And of what worth would the blood of all goats or even of all men be, if they were sacrificed to obtain Divine grace for us? It is only the Blood of this Man-God would merit for us pardon and eternal salvation. But if God Himself had not devised this way to redeem us, as He did by dying to save us, who ever would have been able to think of it? His love alone designed it and executed it. Therefore holy Job did well to cry out to this God Who loves man so much: *What is man that thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost thou set thy heart upon him?*—(Job vii., 17). Ah, my Jesus, one heart is but little with which to love Thee. If I loved Thee even with the hearts of all men, it would be too little. What ingratitude, then, would it be if I were to divide my heart between Thee and creatures! No, my Love, Thou wouldst have it all, and well dost Thou deserve it; I will give it all to Thee. If I do not know how to give it Thee as I ought, take it Thyself, and grant that I may be able to say to Thee with truth: *Thou art the God of my heart.*—(Ps. lxxii., 26). Ah, my Redeemer, by the merits of the abject and afflicted life that Thou didst will to live for me, give me true humility which will make me love contempt and an obscure life. May I lovingly embrace all infirmities, affronts, persecutions and interior sufferings, and all the crosses which may come to me from Thy hands. Let me love Thee, and then dispose of me as Thou wilt. O loving Heart of my Jesus, make me love Thee by discovering to me the immense Good that Thou art. Make

me all Thine before I die. I love Thee, my Jesus, Who art worthy to be loved. I love Thee with all my heart; I love Thee with all my soul.

Spiritual Reading.

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH.

2.—ST. ARCADIUS.

(January 12).

St. Arcadius was a native of Africa, and most probably suffered Martyrdom in Cæsarea (at present Cherchell, a small village in the province of Mascara, in Algiers), the capital of Mauritania. A furious persecution was raging—during which the Christians were cruelly dragged before the idols to sacrifice. Arcadius withdrew to a solitary place, where he employed his time in fasting and prayer. Meanwhile as he did not appear at the public sacrifices, soldiers were despatched to surprise him in his house, but not finding him, they arrested one of his relatives in order to make him discover the retreat of his kinsman.

Arcadius was unwilling that another should suffer on his account, and presented himself to the governor, saying that his relative might be discharged, as he had come to answer for himself. The governor replied that he also might depart unhurt if he would sacrifice to the gods. The Saint courageously answered : " Thou art deceived if thou believest that threats of death can affright the servants of God. They say with St. Paul : *To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*—(Philipp i., 21). Invent therefore, what tortures thou canst, we shall never be separated from our God."

Hereupon the tyrant, full of wrath, and thinking the usual tortures too light for Arcadius, ordered that joint after joint should be chopped off the Saint's body, beginning with his toes. The barbarous butchery was

instantly executed, during which the holy Martyr ceased not to bless the Lord. After his body had been reduced to a mere trunk, calmly surveying his mangled limbs scattered around him, he exclaimed : " Oh, happy members that have served to manifest the glory of God ! Now that I behold you separated from my body, you are dearer to me than ever. I now know that I belong to Jesus Christ, as I have always desired."

Then turning to those present who were idolaters, he said : " Know ye that all these sufferings are easily overcome by those who continually keep before their eyes eternal life which God bestows upon His servants. Adore the true God, Who consoles me in these tortures ; and abandon the worship of your false gods who cannot assist you in your need. He who dies for the true God acquires life everlasting. Behold, for having suffered these torments, I go to live with Him eternally, without fear of ever losing Him." Having finished his discourse, he placidly gave his soul to his Redeemer, on the 12th of January.

This Martyrdom filled the idolaters with confusion, and inspired the Christians with a great desire of laying down their lives for Jesus Christ. They afterwards collected the scattered limbs of the Martyr and gave them honourable burial.

Evening Meditation.

THE GOODNESS AND KINDNESS OF GOD, OUR SAVIOUR.

I.

The goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared.—(Tit. iii., 4).

God has loved man from all eternity : *I have loved thee with an everlasting love.*—(Jer. xxxi., 3). St. Bernard says that before the Incarnation of the Word

the Divine Power appeared in creating the world, and the Divine Wisdom in governing it, but when the Son of God became Man, then was made manifest the Love which God had for men. And, in fact, after seeing Jesus Christ accept so afflicted a life and so painful a death, we would be offering Him an insult if we doubted the great love which He bears us. Yes, He does surely love us, and because He loves us, He wishes to be loved by us. *And Christ died for all, that they also who live may not now live to themselves, but for him who died for them and rose again.*—(2 Cor. v., 15).

Ah, my Saviour, when shall I begin to understand the love Thou hast had for me? Hitherto instead of loving Thee, I have repaid Thee with offences and contempt of Thy graces, but since Thou art infinite in goodness I will not lose confidence. Thou hast promised to pardon him who repents; for Thy mercy's sake fulfil Thy promise to me. I have dishonoured Thee by putting Thee aside to follow my own pleasures; but now I grieve for it from the bottom of my soul, and there is no sorrow that afflicts me more than the remembrance of having offended Thee, my Sovereign Good. Pardon me and unite me entirely to Thee by an eternal bond of love, that I may not leave Thee any more, and that I may live only to love Thee and to obey Thee. Yes, my Jesus, for Thee alone will I live, Thee only will I love. Once I left Thee for creatures, now I leave all to give myself wholly to Thee. I love Thee, O God of my soul, I love Thee more than myself. O Mary, Mother of God, obtain for me the grace to be faithful to God till death.

II.

By this hath the charity of God appeared towards us, because God hath sent his only-begotten Son into the world that we might live by him.—(1 John iv., 9).

All men were dead by sin, and they would have remained dead if the Eternal Father had not sent His Son to restore them to life by His death. But how? What is this? A God to die for man! A God! And who is this man? "Quid sum ego?" asks St. Bonaventure. What am I?

"O Lord, and why hast Thou loved me so much?" But it is in this that the infinite love of God shines forth. *By this hath the charity of God appeared.* The Holy Church exclaims on Holy Saturday, "O wonderful condescension of Thy mercy toward us! O inestimable affection of charity! That Thou mightest redeem a slave, Thou didst deliver up Thy Son!" O immense compassion! O prodigy! O excess of the love of God! To deliver a servant and a sinner from the death that he deserves, God's innocent Son is condemned to die!

Thou, then, O my God, hast done this that we might live by Jesus Christ: *that we might live by him.* Yes, indeed, it is but meet that we should live for Him, Who has given all His Blood and His life for us. My dear Redeemer, in the presence of Thy Wounds and of the Cross on which I see Thee dead for me, I consecrate to Thee my life and my whole will. Ah, make me all Thine, for from this day forward I seek and desire none but Thee. I love Thee, infinite Goodness; I love Thee, infinite Love. While I live may I always repeat, *My God, I love Thee! I love Thee!* Let my last words in death be: *My God, I love Thee! I love Thee!*

Saturday—Third Week after Epiphany

(*Feast of the Purification and Presentation, Feb.* 2).

Morning Meditation.

"*AND THY OWN SOUL A SWORD SHALL PIERCE.*"

Mary already knew all the torments that her Son was to endure, but in the words addressed to her by Simeon, *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce*, all the minute circumstances of the sufferings, internal and external,

that were to torment Jesus in His Passion, were made known to her. Mary consented, saying : Eternal Father, since Thou willest that it should be so, *not my will, but Thine be done* !

I.

Already the most Blessed Virgin was enlightened by the Sacred Scriptures, and knew the sufferings that the Redeemer was to endure in His life, and still more at the time of His death. But in the words of Simeon, *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce*, all the minute circumstances of the sufferings, internal and external, that were to torment her Jesus in His Passion, were made known to her, as our Lord revealed to St. Teresa. She consented to all with a constancy which filled even the Angels with astonishment; she pronounced the sentence that her Son should die, and die by so ignominious and painful a death, saying : " Eternal Father, since Thou willest that it should be so, *not my will, but thine be done*.—(Luke, xxii., 42). I unite my will to Thy most holy will, and I sacrifice this, my Son to Thee. I am satisfied that He should lose His life for Thy glory and the salvation of the world. At the same time I sacrifice my heart to Thee, that it may be transpierced with sorrow, and this as much as Thou pleasest : it suffices me, my God, that Thou art glorified and satisfied with my offering : *Not my will, but Thine be done!* O charity without measure ! O constancy without parallel ! O victory which deserves the eternal admiration of Heaven and earth !

Hence it was that Mary was silent during the Passion of Jesus, when He was unjustly accused. She said not a word to Pilate who was somewhat inclined to set her Son at liberty, knowing, as he did, His innocence. She only appeared in public to assist at the great Sacrifice, which was to be accomplished on Calvary; she accompanied her beloved Son to the place of execution; she was with Him from the first moment, when He was nailed on the Cross : *There stood by the cross of Jesus his mother*—(Jo. xix., 25), until she saw Him expire,

and the Sacrifice was consummated. And all this she did to complete the offering which she had made of Him to God in the Temple.

O holy Mother of God, and my Mother Mary, thou wast so deeply interested in my salvation as to offer to death the dearest object of thy heart, thy beloved Jesus! Since, then, thou didst so much desire to see me saved, it is right that, after God, I should place all my hopes in thee. O yes, most Blessed Virgin, I do, indeed, entirely confide in thee. Ah, by the merits of the great sacrifice which thou didst offer this day to God, the sacrifice of the life of thy Son, entreat Him to have pity on my poor soul for which this Immaculate Lamb did not refuse to die on the Cross.

II.

To understand the violence Mary had to offer herself in this Sacrifice it would be necessary to understand the love that this Mother bore to Jesus. Generally speaking, the love of mothers is so tender towards their children, that, when these are at the point of death, and there is fear of losing them, it causes them to forget all their faults and defects, and even the injuries that they may have received from them, and makes them suffer an inexpressible grief. And yet the love of these mothers is a love divided amongst other children, or at least amongst other creatures. Mary had an only Son, and He was the most beautiful of all the sons of Adam—most amiable, for He had everything to make Him so: He was obedient, virtuous, innocent, holy; suffice it to say, He was God! Again, this Mother's love was not divided amongst other objects; she had concentrated all her love in this only Son; nor did she fear to exceed in loving Him; for this Son was God Who merits infinite love. And this Son was the Victim that she of her own free-will had to sacrifice to death!

Let each one, then, consider how much it must have cost Mary, and what strength of mind she had to exercise in this act, by which she sacrificed the life of so amiable a Son to the Cross. Behold, therefore, the most

fortunate of mothers, because the Mother of a God, but who was at the same time, of all mothers, the most worthy of compassion, being the most afflicted, inasmuch as she saw her Son destined to die on the Cross from the day on which He was given to her. What mother would accept of a child, knowing that she would afterwards miserably lose him by an ignominious death, and that moreover she herself would be present and see him thus die? Mary willingly accepts this Son on so hard a condition; and not only does she accept Him, but she herself on this day offers Him with her own hand to death, sacrificing Him to divine Justice.

I desire, O my Queen, to offer my poor heart to God on this day, in imitation of thee; but I fear that seeing it so sordid and loathsome, He may refuse it. But if thou offerest it to Him, He will not reject it. He is always pleased with and accepts the offerings presented to Him by thy most pure hands. To thee, then, O Mary, do I this day present myself, miserable as I am; to Thee do I give myself without reserve. Do thou offer me as thy servant, together with Jesus to the Eternal Father, and beseech Him, by the merits of thy Son and for thy sake, to accept me and take me as His own. Ah, my sweetest Mother, for the love of thy sacrificed Son, help me always and at all times, and abandon me not. Never permit me to lose by my sins this most amiable Redeemer, Whom on this day thou didst offer with bitter grief to the cruel death of the Cross. Remind Him that I am thy servant, that in thee I have placed all my hope; say, in fine, that thou willest my salvation, and He will graciously hear thee.

Spiritual Reading.

THE PURIFICATION OF MARY.

THE GREAT SACRIFICE WHICH MARY MADE ON THIS DAY TO GOD IN OFFERING HIM THE LIFE OF HER SON.

In the Old Law there were two precepts concerning the birth of first-born son. One was, that the mother should remain as unclean, retired in her house for forty days; after which she was to go to purify herself in the Temple. The other was, that the parents of the first-born son should take him to the Temple, and there offer him to God. On this day the most Blessed Virgin obeyed both these precepts. Although Mary was not bound by the law of Purification, since she was always a virgin and always pure, yet her humility and obedience made her wish to go like other mothers to purify herself. She at the same time obeyed the second precept, to present and offer her Son to the Eternal Father. *And after the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished, they carried him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.*—(Luke ii., 22). But the Blessed Virgin did not offer Him as other mothers offered their sons. Others, indeed, offered them to God; but they knew that this oblation was simply a legal ceremony, and that by redeeming them they made them their own, without fear of having again to offer them to death. Mary really offered her Son to death, and knew for certain that the sacrifice of the life of Jesus which she then made was one day to be actually consummated on the Altar of the Cross; so that Mary, by offering the life of her Son, came, in consequence of the love she bore this Son, really to sacrifice her own entire self to God.

The Eternal Father had already determined to save man who was lost by sin, and to deliver him from eternal death. But because He willed at the same time that His Divine justice should not be defrauded of a due and

worthy satisfaction, He spared not the life of His Son already become Man to redeem man, but willed that He should pay with the utmost rigour the penalty which men had deserved. *He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.*—(Rom. viii., 32). He sent Him, therefore, on earth to become Man. He destined Him a Mother, and willed that this Mother should be the Blessed Virgin Mary. But as He willed not that His Divine Word should become her Son before she by an express consent had accepted Him, so also He willed not that Jesus should sacrifice His life for the salvation of men without the concurrent assent of Mary; that, together with the sacrifice of the life of the Son, the Mother's heart might also be sacrificed. St. Thomas teaches that the quality of mother gives her a special right over her children; hence, Jesus being in Himself innocent and undeserving of punishment, it seemed fitting that He should not be condemned to the Cross as a Victim for the sins of the world without the consent of His Mother, by which she should willingly offer Him to death.

But although from the moment she became the Mother of Jesus, Mary consented to His death, yet God willed that on this day she should make a solemn sacrifice of herself by offering her Son to Him in the Temple, sacrificing His precious life to Divine justice. Hence St. Epiphanius calls her "a priest." And now we begin to see how much this sacrifice cost her, and what heroic virtues she had to practise when she herself subscribed to the sentence by which her beloved Jesus was condemned to death.

Behold Mary is actually on her road to Jerusalem to offer her Son; she hastens her steps towards the place of sacrifice and she herself bears the beloved Victim in her arms. She enters the Temple, approaches the altar, and there, beaming with modesty, devotion, and humility, presents her Son to the Most High. In the meantime the holy Simeon who had received a promise from God that he should not die without having first seen the expected Messias, takes the Divine Child from the arms of the Blessed Virgin, and, enlightened by the

Holy Ghost, announces to her how much the sacrifice she then made of her Son would cost her, and that with Him her own blessed soul would also be sacrificed.

Here St. Thomas of Villanova contemplates the holy old man becoming troubled and silent at the thought of having to give utterance to a Prophecy so fatal to this poor Mother. The Saint then looks on Mary who asks him : " Why, O Simeon, art thou thus troubled in the midst of such great consolations?" " O royal Virgin," he replies, " I would desire not to announce thee tidings so bitter; but since God thus wills it for thy greater merit, listen to what I have to say. This Child, Who is now such a source of joy to thee—and, O God, with how much reason!—this Child, I say, will one day be a source of such bitter grief to thee as no creature in the world has ever experienced. And this will be when thou seest Him persecuted by men of every class, and made a butt upon earth for their scoffs and outrages; they will even go so far as to put Him to death as a malefactor before thine own eyes! Thou so greatly rejoicest in this Infant; but, behold, He is placed for a sign that shall be contradicted. Know that after His death there will be many Martyrs, who for the love of this Son of thine will be tormented and put to death; their Martyrdom, however, will be endured in their bodies; but thine, O Divine Mother, will be endured in thy heart. O, how many thousands of men will be torn to pieces and put to death for the love of this Child! And although they will all suffer much in their bodies, thou, O Virgin, wilt suffer much more in thy heart."

Yes, in her heart; for compassion for the sufferings of this most beloved Son was alone the sword of sorrow which was to pierce the heart of the Mother, as St. Simeon exactly foretold : *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce.*—(Luke ii., 35). Already the most blessed Virgin, as St. Jerome says, was enlightened by the Sacred Scriptures, and knew the suffering that the Redeemer was to endure in His life, and still more at the time of His death. She fully understood from the Prophets that He was to be betrayed by one of His disciples : *For even the man of my peace, in whom I*

trusted, who ate my bread, hath greatly supplanted me —(Ps. xl., 10), as David foretold : that He was to be abandoned by them : *Strike the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.*—(Zach. xiii., 7). She well knew the contempt, the spitting, the blows, the derisions that He was to suffer from the people : *I have given my body to the strikers, and my cheeks to them that plucked them : I have not turned away my face from them that rebuked me and that spit upon me.*—(Is. l., 6). She knew that He was to become the reproach of men, and the outcast and the most degraded of the people, so as to be saturated with insults and injuries : *But I am a worm, and no man : the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people.* —(Ps. xxi., 7). *He shall be filled with reproaches.* —(Lam. iii., 30). She knew that at the end of His life His most sacred flesh would be torn and mangled by scourges : *But he was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins.*—(Is. liii., 5). And this to such a degree that His whole body was to be disfigured, and become like that of a leper—all wounds and the bones appearing. *There is no beauty in him nor comeliness . . . and we have thought him, as it were, a leper.*—(Is. liii., 2). *They have numbered all my bones.*—(Ps. xxi., 18). She knew that He was to be pierced by nails : *They have dug my hands and feet.*—(Ps. xxi., 17). To be ranked with malefactors : *And was reputed with the wicked.* —(Is. liii., 12). And that finally, hanging on a Cross, He was to die for the salvation of men : *And they shall look upon me, whom they have pierced.*—(Zach. xii., 10).

Evening Meditation.

MARY'S GENEROSITY IN OFFERING JESUS TO DEATH FOR US.

1.

St. Bonaventure says that the Blessed Virgin would have accepted the pains and death of her Son far more willingly for herself; but to obey God she made the great

offering of the Divine life of her Beloved Jesus, conquering, but with an excess of grief, the tender love which she bore Him. Hence it is that in this offering Mary had to do herself more violence and showed herself more generous than if she had offered herself to suffer all that her Son was to endure. Therefore she surpassed all the Martyrs in generosity; for the Martyrs offered their own lives, but the Blessed Virgin offered the life of her Son Whom she loved and esteemed infinitely more than her own life. Nor did the sufferings of this painful offering end here; nay, rather they only began; for from that time forward, during the whole life of her Son, Mary had constantly before her eyes the death and all the torments that He was to endure. Hence, the more this Son showed Himself beautiful, gracious, and amiable, the more did the anguish of her heart increase.

Ah, most sorrowful Mother, hadst thou loved thy Son less, or had He been less amiable, or had He loved thee less, thy sufferings in offering Him to death would certainly have been diminished. But there never was, and never will be, a mother who loved her son more than thou didst love thine; for there never was, and never will be a son more amiable, or one who loved his mother more than thy Jesus loved thee. O God, had we beheld the beauty, the majesty of the countenance of that Divine Child, could we have ever had the courage to sacrifice His life for our own salvation? And thou, O Mary, who wast His Mother, and a Mother loving Him with so tender a love, thou couldst offer thy innocent Son for the salvation of men, to a death more painful and cruel than ever was endured by the greatest malefactor on earth!

II.

Ah, how sad a scene from that day forward must love have continually placed before the eyes of Mary,—a scene representing all the outrages and mockeries which her poor Son was to endure! See, love already represents Him agonized with sorrow in the Garden, mangled with scourges, crowned with thorns in the Pretorium, and

finally hanging on the ignominious Cross on Calvary! "Behold, O Mother," says love, "what an amiable and innocent Son thou offerest to so many torments and to so horrible a death!" And to what purpose save Him from the hands of Herod, since it is only to reserve Him for a far more sorrowful end?

Thus Mary not only offered her Son to death in the Temple, but she renewed that offering every moment of her life; for she revealed to St. Bridget "that the sorrow announced to her by the holy Simeon never left her heart until her Assumption into Heaven." Hence St. Anselm thus addresses her: "O compassionate Lady, I cannot believe that thou couldst have endured for a moment so excruciating a torment without expiring under it, had not God Himself, the Spirit of Life, sustained thee."

If the sacrifice of Abraham by which he offered his son Isaac to God was so pleasing to the Divine Majesty, that as a reward He promised to multiply his descendants as the stars of Heaven—*Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for my sake, I will bless thee, and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven*—(Gen. xxii., 16, 17)—we must certainly believe that the more noble sacrifice which Mary made to God of her Jesus, was far more agreeable to Him, and therefore that He has granted that through her prayers the number of the elect should be multiplied, that is to say, increased by the number of her fortunate children; for she considers and protects as such all her devout clients.

St. Simeon received a promise from God that he should not die until he had seen the Messias born: *And he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord.* —(Luke ii., 26). But this grace he only received through Mary, for it was in her arms that he found the Saviour. Hence, he who desires to find Jesus, will not find Him otherwise than by Mary. Let us, then, go to this Divine Mother if we wish to find Jesus, and let us go with great confidence.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

DANGERS TO OUR ETERNAL SALVATION.

And when he entered into the boat his disciples followed him, and behold, a great tempest arose in the sea. (Gospel of Sunday. Matt. viii., 23–27).

The boat on the sea represents man in this world. As a vessel is exposed to a thousand dangers, to pirates, to quicksands, to hidden rocks and to tempests, so man in this life is encompassed with perils. Who shall be able to deliver us? Only God: *Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it.*—(Ps. cxxvi., 2).

I.

In this day's Gospel we find that when Jesus Christ entered the boat with His disciples, a great tempest arose, so that the boat was on the point of being lost. During the storm the Saviour was asleep; but the disciples, terrified by the winds, ran to awake Him and said: *Lord save us: we perish.* Jesus gave them courage by saying: *Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then rising up he commanded the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm.*

The boat on the sea represents man in this world. As a vessel on the sea is exposed to a thousand dangers to pirates, to quicksands, to hidden rocks, and to tempests, so man in this life is encompassed with perils arising from the temptations of hell, from the occasions of sin, from the scandals or bad counsels of men, from human respect, and, above all, from the bad passions of

corrupt nature, represented by the winds that agitate the sea and expose the vessel to great danger of being lost.

Thus, as St. Leo says, our life is full of dangers, of snares, and of enemies. The first enemy of the salvation of every Christian is his own corruption. *Every man is tempted by his own concupiscence, being drawn away and allured.*—(James i., 14).

Along with the corrupt inclinations which live within us and drag us to evil, we have many enemies from without that fight against us. We have the devils with whom the contest is very difficult, because they are stronger than we are. Hence, because we have to contend with powerful enemies, St. Paul exhorts us to arm ourselves with the Divine aid : *Put you on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in high places.*—(Ephes. vi., 11). The devil, according to St. Peter, is a lion who is continually going about, roaring through the rage and hunger which impel him to devour our souls. *Your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour.*—(1 Pet. v., 8).

Even the very men with whom we must converse endanger our salvation. They persecute or betray us, or deceive us by their flattery and bad counsels. St. Augustine says that among the faithful there are in every profession deceitful men. Now if a fortress were full of rebels within, and encompassed by enemies from without, who is there that would not regard it as lost? Such is the condition of each of us as long as we live in this world. Who shall be able to deliver us from so many powerful enemies? Only God : *Unless the Lord keepeth the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it.*—(Ps. cxxvi., 2).

II.

What, then, is the means by which we can save our souls in the midst of so many dangers? It is to imitate the holy disciples—to have recourse to our Divine Master, and say to Him: *Lord, save us: we perish.* When the tempest is violent, the pilot never takes his eyes from the light which guides him to the port. In like manner we should keep our eyes always turned to God Who alone can deliver us from the many dangers to which we are exposed. It was thus David acted when he found himself assailed by the dangers of sin. *I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains from whence help shall come to me.* (Ps. cxx., 1). To teach us to recommend ourselves continually to Him Who alone can save us by His grace, the Lord has ordained that, as long as we remain on this earth, we shall have to live in the midst of a continual tempest, and be surrounded by enemies. The temptations of the devil, the persecutions of men, the adversity which we suffer in this world, are not evils: they are, on the contrary, advantages, if we know how to make of them the use which God wishes, Who, for our welfare, sends or permits them. They detach our affections from this earth, and inspire a disgust for this world, by making us feel bitterness and thorns even in its honours, its riches, its delights, and amusements. The Lord permits all these apparent evils, that we may take our affection from fading goods, in which we meet with so many dangers of perdition, and that we may seek to unite ourselves with Him Who alone can make us happy.

Our error and mistake is, when we find ourselves harassed by infirmities, by poverty, by persecutions, and by such tribulations, instead of having recourse to the Lord, we turn to creatures and place our confidence in their assistance. The Lord does not forbid us, in our afflictions and dangers to have recourse to human means; but He wishes us to have recourse to Himself before all others, and to place our only hope in Him, that we may also centre in Him all our love.

Spiritual Reading.

"*LORD SAVE US: WE PERISH.*"

As long as we live on this earth we must, according to St. Paul, work out our salvation *in fear and trembling* in the midst of the dangers by which we are beset. Once upon a time when a certain ship was in the open sea a great tempest arose which made the captain tremble. In the hold of the vessel there was an animal eating with as much tranquillity as if the sea were perfectly calm. The captain being asked why he was so much afraid, replied: If I had a soul like the soul of this brute, I too would be tranquil and without fear; but because I have a rational and an immortal soul, I am afraid of death, after which I must appear before the Judgment seat of God; and therefore I tremble through fear. Let us tremble. The salvation of our immortal souls is at stake. They who do not tremble, are, as St. Paul says, in great danger of being lost; because they who fear not, seldom recommend themselves to God, and labour but little to adopt the means of salvation. Let us beware! We are, says St. Cyprian, still in the battle, and still combat for eternal salvation.

The first means of salvation, then, is to recommend ourselves continually to God that He may keep His hands over us, and preserve us from offending Him. The next is to cleanse the soul from all past sins by making a General Confession. A General Confession is a powerful help to a change of life. When the tempest is violent the burden of the vessel is diminished, and every man on board throws his goods into the sea in order to save his life. O folly of sinners, who, in the midst of so great dangers of eternal perdition, instead of diminishing the burden of the vessel—that is, instead of unburdening the soul of her sins—load her with a greater weight. Instead of flying from the dangers of sin, they fearlessly continue to put themselves voluntarily into dangerous

occasions; and, instead of having recourse to God's mercy for the pardon of their offences, they offend Him still more, and compel Him to abandon them.

Another means is to labour strenuously not to allow ourselves to become the slaves of irregular passions. *Give me not over to a shameless and foolish mind.* —(Ecclus. xxiii., 6). Do not, O Lord, deliver me up to a mind blinded by passion. He who is thus blinded sees not what he is doing, and therefore he is in danger of falling into every crime. Hence it is so many are lost by submitting to the tyranny of their passions. Some are slaves to the passion of avarice. They do not resist the passion in the beginning, but foster it till death, and thus at their last moments leave but little reason to hope for their salvation. Others are slaves to sensual pleasures. They are not content with lawful gratifications, and therefore they pass to the indulgence of those that are forbidden. Others are subject to anger; and because they are not careful to check the fire at its commencement when it is small, it increases and grows into a spirit of revenge.

Disorderly affections, if they are not beaten down in the beginning, become our greatest tyrants. Many, says St. Ambrose, after having victoriously resisted the persecutions of the enemies of the Faith, were afterwards lost because they did not resist the first assaults of some earthly passion. Of this Origen was a miserable example. He fought for, and was prepared to give his life in defence of the Faith; but, by afterwards yielding to human respect, he was led to deny it, as we are told by Natalis Alexander. We have still a more miserable example in Solomon who, after having received so many gifts from God, and after being inspired by the Holy Ghost, was, by indulging in a passion for certain pagan women, induced to offer incense to idols. The unhappy man who submits to the slavery of his wicked passions, resembles the ox that is sent to the slaughter after a life of constant labour. During their whole lives worldlings groan under the weight of their sins, and, at the end of their days, fall into hell.

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Let us conclude. When the winds are strong and violent, the pilot lowers the sails and casts anchor. So when we find ourselves assailed by any bad passion, we should always lower the sails; that is, we should avoid all the occasions that may increase the passion, and cast anchor by uniting ourselves to God, and by begging of Him to give us strength not to offend Him.

But some will say: What am I to do? I live in the midst of the world where my passions continually assail me even against my will. I will answer in the words of Origen: "The man who lives in the darkness of the world and in the midst of secular business, can with difficulty serve God." Whoever then wishes to insure his eternal salvation, let him retire from the world, and take refuge in one of those exact Religious Communities which are the secure harbours in the sea of this world. If he cannot actually leave the world, let him leave it at least in affection by detaching his heart from the things of this world, and from his own evil inclinations: *Go not after thy lusts*, says the Holy Ghost, *but turn away from thy own will.*—(Ecclus. xviii., 30). Follow not your own concupiscence; and when your will impels you to evil, you must not indulge, but must resist its inclinations.

The time is short: it remaineth that they also who have wives be as if they had none; and they that weep as though they wept not; and they that rejoice as if they rejoiced not; and they that buy as though they possessed not; and they that use this world as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away. —(1 Cor. vii., 29). The time of life is short; we should then prepare for death, which is rapidly approaching; and to prepare for that awful moment let us reflect that everything in this world shall soon end. Hence the Apostle tells those who suffer in this life to be as if they suffered not, because the miseries of this life shall soon pass away, and they who save their souls shall be happy for eternity. And he exhorts those who enjoy the goods of this earth to be as if they enjoyed them not, because they must one day leave all things; and if they lose their souls, they shall be for ever miserable.

Evening Meditation.

THE DEATH OF THE JUST.

I.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.—(Ps. cxv., 15).

Viewed according to the senses, death excites fear and terror; but viewed with the eyes of Faith, it is consoling and desirable. To sinners it appears full of terror; but to the Saints it is amiable and precious. "It is precious," says St. Bernard, "as the end of labours, the consummation of victory, the gate of life." It is the end of toils and labours. *Man*, says Job, *born of woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries.*—(Job xiv., 1). Behold a picture of our life! It is short and all full of miseries, of infirmities, of fears, and of passions. What, says Seneca, do worldlings, who desire a long life, seek, but a continuation of torments? What, says St. Augustine, is a prolongation of life, but a prolongation of suffering? Yes, for as St. Ambrose tells us, the present life is given us not for repose, but that we may labour, and by our toils merit eternal glory. Hence Tertullian has justly said, that when God abridges life He abridges pain. Hence, though man has been condemned to death in punishment of sin, still the miseries of this life are so great, that, according to St. Ambrose, death appears to be a remedy and relief, rather than a chastisement. God pronounces happy all who die in His grace, because they terminate their labours and go to repose. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours.*—(Apoc. xiv., 13).

O my beloved Jesus, Who, to obtain for me a happy death, hast freely submitted to so painful a death on Calvary, when shall I see Thee? The first time I shall behold Thee, I shall see Thee as my Judge in the very

place in which I shall expire. What shall I then say? What wilt Thou say to me? I will not wait till that moment to think of what I shall say: I will think on it now. I will say to Thee: My Redeemer, Thou art the God Who hast died for me! I have hitherto offended Thee; I have been ungrateful to Thee; I did not deserve pardon, but afterwards, assisted by Thy grace, I entered into myself, and, during the remainder of my life, I bewailed my sins, and Thou hast pardoned me. Pardon me again, now that I am at Thy feet, and give me a general absolution of all my sins. I did not deserve ever again to love Thee, because I despised Thy love; but Thou in Thy mercy drew my heart to Thee, so that if I have not loved Thee as Thou deservest, I have at least loved Thee above all things, and have left all to please Thee. I see that Paradise and the possession of Thee in Thy kingdom is too great a reward; but I cannot live at a distance from Thee, now, especially, after Thou hast shown me Thy amiable and beautiful countenance. I therefore ask for Paradise, not to enjoy greater delights, but to love Thee more perfectly. Send me to Purgatory as long as Thou pleasest. Defiled as I am at present, I do not wish to enter into the land of purity, and to see myself among those pure souls. Send me to be purified; but do not banish me forever from Thy Presence. I shall be content to be one day, whenever Thou pleasest, called to Paradise to sing Thy mercies for all eternity. Ah, my beloved Jesus, raise Thy hand and bless me; tell me that I am Thine, and that Thou art and shall be forever mine. I will always love Thee, and Thou wilt forever love me. Behold, I go to a distance from Thee; I go into fire: but I go in peace because I go to love Thee, my Redeemer, my God, my All! I am content to go; but during my absence from Thee, I go, O Lord, to count the moments that will elapse before Thou callest me. Have mercy on a soul that loves Thee with all its power, and that sighs to see Thee that it may love Thee better.

Thus, I hope, O my Jesus, to speak to Thee at death. I entreat Thee to give me the grace to live in such a

manner that I may then say to Thee what I now propose. Give me holy perseverance, give me Thy love. Assist me, O Mary; Mother of God, pray to Jesus for me.

II.

The torments which afflict sinners at death do not disturb the peace of the Saints. *The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them.*—(Wis. iii., 1). That *Proficiscere! Depart!* so full of terror to worldlings does not alarm the Saints. The just man is not afflicted at the thought of being obliged to take leave of the goods of the earth, for he has always kept his heart detached from them. During life he has constantly said to the Lord: *Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever.*—(Ps. lxxii., 26). Happy you, said the Apostle to his disciples, who have been robbed of your goods for the sake of Jesus Christ. *You took with joy the being stripped of your goods, knowing that you have a better and a lasting substance.*—(Heb. x., 34). The Saint is not afflicted at bidding an eternal farewell to honours, for he always hated them, and considered them to be what they really are—smoke and vanity. He is not afflicted in leaving relatives, for he loved them only in God, and at death he recommends them to the heavenly Father, Who loves them more than he does; and having a secure confidence of salvation, he expects to be better able to assist them from Heaven than on this earth. In a word, he who has constantly said during life: *My God and my All!* continues to repeat it with greater consolation and greater tenderness at the hour of death.

He who dies loving God, is not disturbed by the pains of death; but, seeing that he is now at the end of life, and that he has no more time to suffer for God, or to offer Him other proofs of his love, he accepts these pains with joy. With affection and peace he offers to God these last moments of life, and feels consoled in uniting the sacrifice of his death to the Sacrifice which Jesus Christ offered for him on the Cross to His Eternal Father. Thus he dies happily, saying: *In peace in the self-same*

I will sleep and I will rest.—(Ps. iv., 9). Oh ! how great the peace of the Christian who dies abandoning himself to, and reposing in the arms of Jesus Christ Who has loved us unto death, and has condescended to suffer so cruel a death in order to obtain for us a death full of sweetness and consolation.

Monday—Fourth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE DEATH OF THE JUST IS A VICTORY.

The present life is an unceasing warfare with hell, in which we are in constant danger. The news of their approaching death filled the Saints with consolation. They knew that their struggles and dangers were soon to have an end and that they should soon be in secure possession of the happy lot in which they could never more lose God.

I.

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and death shall be no more.—(Apoc. xxi., 4). Then at death the Lord will wipe away from the eyes of His servants all the tears they shed in this world, where they lived in the midst of fears, of dangers, and of combats with hell. The greatest consolation which a soul that has loved God will experience in hearing the news of death, will arise from the thought that it will soon be delivered from the many dangers of offending God to which it is exposed in this life, from so many troubles of conscience, and from so many temptations of the devil. The present

life is an unceasing warfare with hell, in which we are in continual danger of losing our souls and God. St. Ambrose says that in this life *we walk among snares.* We walk continually amid the snares of enemies who lie in wait to deprive us of the life of grace. It was this danger that made St. Peter of Alcantara say at death to a Religious who, in attending the Saint, accidentally touched him : " Brother, remove, remove away from me; for I am still alive, and in danger of being lost." The thought of being freed by death from the danger of sin consoled St. Teresa, and made her rejoice as often as she heard the clock strike, that another hour of the combat had passed. Hence she would say : " In each moment of life I may sin and lose God." Hence, the news of their approaching death filled the Saints with consolation; because they knew that their struggles and dangers were soon to have an end, and that they would soon be in secure possession of that happy lot in which they could never more lose God.

It is related in the Lives of the Fathers, that one of them who was very old, when dying, smiled while the others wept. Being asked why he smiled, he replied : " And why do you weep at seeing me go to rest?" Likewise St. Catherine of Sienna in her last moments said : " Rejoice with me, for I quit this land of pains and go to a place of peace." If, says St. Cyprian, you lived in a house whose walls and roof and floors were tottering, and threatened destruction, how ardently would you desire to fly from it! In this life everything menaces the ruin of the soul; the world, hell, the passions, the rebellious senses, all draw us to sin and eternal death.

Into thy hands I commend my spirit; Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth.—(Ps. xxx., 6). Ah, my sweet Redeemer, what would have become of me if Thou hadst deprived me of life when I was far from Thee? I should now be in hell, where I could never love Thee. I thank Thee for not having abandoned me, and for having bestowed on me so many great graces in order to gain my heart. I am sorry for having offended Thee. I love Thee above all things. Ah! I entreat Thee to make me always sensible of the evil I have done in

despising Thee, and of the love which Thy infinite goodness merits. I love Thee, and I desire to die soon if such be Thy will, that I may be freed from the danger of ever again losing Thy grace, and that I may be secure of loving Thee forever.

II.

Who, exclaimed the Apostle, *shall deliver me from the body of this death?*—(Rom. vii., 24). Oh! how great will be the joy of the soul in hearing these words: "Come, my spouse, from that land of tears. Come from *the dens of the lions* (Cant. iv., 8) that seek to devour you, and rob you of the Divine grace." Hence, St. Paul, sighing for death said that Jesus Christ was his only Life; and therefore he esteemed death his greatest gain, because by death he acquired that Life which never ends. *To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*—(Phil. i., 21).

In taking away a soul while it is in the state of grace out of this world, where it may change its will and lose His friendship, God bestows on it a great favour. *He was taken away lest wickedness should alter his understanding.*—(Wis. iv., 11). Happy in this life is the man that lives in union with God; but as the sailor is not secure until he has arrived at the port and escaped the tempest, so the soul cannot enjoy complete happiness until it has left this world in the grace of God. "Praise," says St. Maximus, "the felicity of the sailor, but not until he has reached the port." Now, if at his approach to the port the sailor rejoices, how much greater ought not the joy and gladness of a Christian to be who is at the point of securing eternal salvation?

Moreover, it is impossible in this life to avoid all venial sins. *For*, says the Holy Ghost, *a just man shall fall seven times.*—(Prov. xxiv., 16). He who quits this life ceases to offend God. "For," says St. Ambrose, "what is death but the burial of vices?" This consideration makes souls that love God long for death. The Venerable Vincent Caraffa consoled himself at death, saying: "By ceasing to live, I cease forever to offend God." And St. Ambrose said: "Why do we desire this

life, in which, the longer we live, the more we are loaded with sins?" He who dies in the grace of God can never more offend Him, says the same holy Doctor. Hence, the Lord praises the *dead* more than any man *living*, though he be a Saint.—(Ecclus. iv., 2). A certain spiritual man gave directions that the person who should bring him the news of death, should say: "Console yourself! The time has arrived when you will no longer offend God."

Ah, my beloved Jesus, during these remaining years of my life, give me strength to do something for Thee before I die. Give me strength against all temptations, and against my passions, but particularly against the passion which has hitherto most violently drawn me to sin. Give me patience in all infirmities, and under all the injuries I may receive from men. I now, for the love of Thee, pardon all who have shown me any contempt, and I beg of Thee to bestow upon them the graces which they stand in need of. Give me strength to be more diligent in avoiding even venial faults, about which I have been hitherto negligent. My Saviour, assist me. I hope for all graces through Thy merits. O Mary, my Mother, and my hope, I place unbounded confidence in thee.

Spiritual Reading.

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH.

3.—ST. SEBASTIAN, OFFICER IN THE ARMY OF DIOCLETIAN.

(January 20).

This Saint was born of Christian parents who dwelt at Narbonne, in Languedoc, but were natives of Milan. St. Ambrose relates that by reason of his extraordinary talents and exemplary conduct, our Saint was much beloved by Diocletian who appointed him captain of the

first company of his guards. Sebastian employed the emoluments of his station in the relief of the poor, and was indefatigable in assisting his brother Christians, particularly those who languished in prison whom he not only relieved with alms, but encouraged to suffer for Jesus Christ. He was consequently considered the main support of the persecuted faithful.

At this time it happened that the two brothers, Marcus and Marcellianus, Roman knights, who had suffered tortures with considerable constancy, were being led to death, when their father, Tarquillinus, and their mother, Marcia, accompanied by the wives and children of the two Confessors, obtained from the judge, Cromatius, by tears and entreaties, that the sentence should be deferred for thirty days. It is easy to imagine what wailings and entreaties were used by their relatives during the respite in order to induce the two brothers to apostatise. Indeed, they were so importunate and unceasing in their efforts, that they who had already confessed the Faith began now to vacillate. But Sebastian, who knew them, ran instantly to their assistance, and God's blessing so accompanied his words that he induced them to receive with joy a most cruel death; for they were obliged to hang nailed by the feet to a gallows for a day and a night before they were transfixed with a lance. Nor was this all. The zealous captain likewise converted to the Faith not only all the above-named relatives of Marcus and Marcellianus, but also Nicostratus, an officer of Cromatius, and Claudius, the provost of the prison, and sixty-four prisoners who were idolaters.

But the most remarkable conversion was that of Cromatius himself who, hearing that Tarquillinus had embraced the Faith, sent for him and said: "Hast thou, then, become mad in the last days of thy life?" The good old man replied: "On the contrary, by embracing the Christian Faith I have become wise, for it is wisdom to prefer an *everlasting life* to the few *wretched days* that await me in this world." He then persuaded him to have an interview with St. Sebastian who quickly persuaded him of the truth of the Christian Religion; and Cromatius, having received Baptism, with his entire family,

and one thousand four hundred slaves, to whom he granted their freedom, renounced his office and retired to his country house.

Fabian, the successor of Cromatius, having learned that Sebastian not only exhorted the Christians to remain steadfast to the Faith, but procured also the conversion of the pagans, reported the fact to the emperor who sent for our Saint and upbraided him with the crime of perverting his subjects. Sebastian answered that he considered he was rendering the greatest possible service to the emperor, since the state benefited by having Christian subjects, whose fidelity to their sovereign is proportionate to their devotedness to Jesus Christ. The emperor, enraged at this reply, ordered that the Saint should be instantly tied to a post, and that a body of archers should discharge their arrows against him. The sentence was immediately executed, and Sebastian was left for dead; but a holy widow, named Irene, went at night to bury him and finding him yet alive brought him to her house where he recovered. After this the Saint went to the emperor, and said to him : " How long, O Prince, wilt thou believe the calumnies that have been spread against the Christians? I have returned to tell thee again that thou hast not in the empire subjects more faithful than the Christians, who by their prayers obtain for thee all thy prosperity."

Diocletian, surprised to see the Saint still living, exclaimed : " How is it that thou art yet alive?" Sebastian answered : " the Lord has been pleased to preserve my life that I might admonish thee of thy impiety in persecuting the Christians."

The emperor, irritated at the admonition, ordered that the Saint should be scourged to death. This sentence being executed, he expired on the 20th January, about the year 228.

The pagans threw the body of the Martyr into a marsh, but a holy lady named Lucina caused it to be taken thence, and buried it at the entrance of a cemetery now called the " Catacombs of St. Sebastian."

Evening Meditation.

THE PATIENCE OF GOD IN WAITING FOR SINNERS.

I.

Who in this world has so much patience with his equals as God has with us His creatures, in bearing with us and waiting for our repentance after the many offences we have committed against Him?

Ah, my God, had I thus offended my brother or my father, long ago would he have driven me from his face! O Father of Mercies, *cast me not away from thy face*—(Ps. l. 13), but have pity on me.

Thou hast mercy, says the Wise Man, *upon all, because thou canst do all things, and overlookest the sins of men for the sake of repentance.*—(Wis. xi., 24). Men conceal their sense of the injuries which they receive, either because they are good, and know that it belongs not to themselves to punish those who offend them; or because they are unable, and have not the power, to revenge themselves. But to Thee, my God, it does belong to take revenge for the offences which are committed against Thy infinite Majesty; and Thou indeed art able to avenge Thyself whenever Thou pleasest, and dost Thou dissemble? Men despise Thee; they make promises to Thee and afterwards betray Thee; and dost Thou seem not to behold them, or as if Thou hadst little concern for Thy honour?

Thus, O Jesus, hast Thou done towards me. Ah! my God, my infinite Good, I will no longer despise Thee, I will no longer provoke Thee to chastise me. And why should I delay until Thou abandonest me in reality and condemnest me to hell? I am truly sorry for all my offences against Thee. I would that I had died rather than offended Thee! Thou art my Lord, Thou hast

created me, and Thou hast redeemed me by Thy death; Thou alone hast loved me, Thou alone deservest to be loved, and Thou alone shall be the sole object of my love.

II.

My soul, how could you be so ungrateful and so daring against your God? When you offended Him, could He not have suddenly called you out of life and punished you in hell? And yet He waited for you. Instead of chastising you, He preserved your life and gave you good things. But you, instead of being grateful to Him and loving Him for such excessive goodness, have continued to offend Him!

O my Lord, since Thou hast waited for me with so great mercy, I give Thee thanks. I am sorry for having offended Thee. I love Thee. I might at this hour have dwelt in hell where I could not have repented, nor have loved Thee. But now that I can repent, I grieve with my whole heart for having offended Thy infinite goodness; and I love Thee above all things, more than I love myself. Forgive me, and grant that from this day I may love no other but Thee, Who hast so loved me. May I live for Thee alone, my Redeemer, Who for me didst die upon the Cross! All my hopes are in Thy bitter Passion. O Mary, Mother of God, assist me by thy holy intercession

Tuesday—Fourth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

FROM THE JUST LIFE IS NOT TAKEN, BUT ONLY EXCHANGED FOR A BETTER.

He who wishes to see God must necessarily pass through the gate of death. Death is the end of labour and the gate of life, says St. Bernard. *This is the gate of the Lord: the just shall enter into it.*

I.

Death is not only the end of labours but it is also the gate of life. He who wishes to see God must necessarily pass through this gate. *This is the gate of the Lord: the just shall enter into it.*—(Ps. cxvii., 20). St. Jerome entreated death to open its gates to him : *Aperi mihi, soror mea.* Death, my sister, if you do not open the door to me, I cannot enter to enjoy my Lord. Seeing in his house a picture in which death was represented with a knife in the hand, St. Charles Borromeo sent for a painter, and ordered him to substitute for the knife a golden key, in order that he might be more and more inflamed with a desire of death, which opens Paradise and admits us to the vision of God.

If, says St. John Chrysostom, a king had prepared for one of his subjects apartments in his own palace, but for a time obliged him to live in a tent, how ardently would the vassal sigh for the day on which he should leave the tent to enter into the palace. In this life the soul, being in the body, is as it were confined in a prison which she must leave in order to enter the celestial palace. Hence David prayed to the Lord *to bring his soul out of prison.*—(Ps. cxl., 8). When the holy Simeon held the Infant Jesus in his arms, he asked no other grace than to be delivered from the prison of the present life. *Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord,*

—(Luke ii., 29). "As if detained by necessity, he," says St. Ambrose, "begs to be dismissed." The Apostle desired the same grace when he said: *I am straitened, having a desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.* —(Phil. i., 23).

How great was the joy of the cup-bearer of Pharaoh when he heard from Joseph that he should soon be rescued from the prison and restored to his position! And will not a soul that loves God exult with gladness at hearing that it will soon be released from the prison of this earth and go to enjoy God? *While we are in the body we are absent from the Lord.*—(2 Cor. v., 6). While the soul is united to the body, it is at a distance from the vision of God, as if in a strange land, and excluded from its true country. Hence, according to St. Bruno, the departure of the soul from the body should not be called death, but the beginning of life.

O God of my soul, I have hitherto dishonoured Thee by turning my back upon Thee, but Thy Son has honoured Thee by offering to Thee the sacrifice of His life on the Cross. Through the honour which Thy beloved Son has given Thee, pardon the dishonour which I have done Thee. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good, for having offended Thee, and I promise henceforth to love nothing but Thee. From Thee I hope for salvation: whatever good is in me at present is the fruit of Thy grace; to Thee I ascribe it all. *By the grace of God, I am what I am.*—(1 Cor. xv., 10). If I have hitherto dishonoured Thee, I hope to honour Thee in Heaven by blessing and praising Thy mercy forever.

II.

The *death of the Saints* is called their *Birthday*; because at death they are born to that life of bliss which will never end. St. Athanasius says: "To the just, death is only a passage to eternal life." "O amiable death," says St. Augustine, "who will not desire thee who art the end of evils, the conclusion of labour, the beginning of everlasting repose?" Hence the holy Doctor frequently prayed for death that he might see God.

The sinner, St. Cyprian says, has just reason to fear death, because he will pass from temporal to eternal death. But he who is in the state of grace, and hopes to pass from death to life, fears not death. In the *Life of St. John the Almoner*, we read that a certain rich man recommended to the prayers of the Saint an only son, and gave the Saint a large sum of money to be distributed in alms, for the purpose of obtaining from God a long life for his son. The son died soon after; and when the father complained of his death, God sent an Angel to say to him: "You sought for your son a *long life*: he now enjoys *eternal life* in Heaven." This is, as was promised by the Prophet Osee, the grace which Jesus Christ merited for us. *O death, I shall be thy death.*—(Osee xiii., 41). By dying for us, Jesus has changed death into life. When Pionius, the Martyr, was being brought to the stake, he was asked by those who conducted him, how he could go to death with so much joy. "You err," replied the Saint: "I go not to death but to life." Thus, also, did the mother of the youthful St. Symphorian exhort him to Martyrdom. "My son," said she, "life is not taken from you; it is only exchanged for a better one."

I feel a great desire to love Thee, O my God. This Thou hast given me: I thank Thee for it, O my Love! Continue, continue the aid which Thou hast begun to give me. I hope to be henceforth Thine and entirely Thine. And what greater pleasure can I enjoy than that of pleasing Thee, my Lord, Who art so amiable, and Who hast loved me so tenderly! O my God, I ask only for love, love, love, and I hope always to ask this love of Thee, until, dying in Thy love, I reach the kingdom of love where I shall be filled with love, and never for a single moment for all eternity cease to love Thee and to love Thee with all my strength. Mary, my Mother, who lovest thy God so intensely, and who desirest so vehemently to see Him loved, obtain for me the grace to love Him ardently in this life, that I may love Him ardently forever in the next.

Spiritual Reading.

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH.

4.—ST. AGNES, VIRGIN.

(January 21).

The name of St. Agnes has obtained universal celebrity. St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Maximus, Prudentius and other illustrious writers,* have been her panegyrists, and she is also mentioned in the Canon of the Mass.

She is said to have been descended from very noble and pious parents, and to have been but twelve or thirteen years of age at the time of her Martrydom. Her extraordinary beauty caused her to be desired by many as their bride, but her principal suitor was Procopius, son of Symphronius, governor of Rome, who sent her a rich present, signifying that he was most anxious to be her husband. But the Saint, who had dedicated her virginity and all her affections to Jesus Christ, answered him that she had been promised to another spouse. Procopius, nothing discouraged by this answer, continued his importunities, until at last the Saint, wishing to free herself forever from his unwelcome attentions, said to him: "Begone from me, thou food of death! I am already engaged to another and far better Spouse. He is the King of Heaven to Whom I have consecrated my entire being."

Procopius not knowing what to do, employed the assistance of his father, Symphronius, whose authority, he thought, might induce Agnes to comply. The governor accordingly summoned her to his presence, and told her he could not conceive why she should refuse the hand of his son, as it was impossible for her to obtain a more advantageous match. The Saint replied that she had a Divine Spouse, Who was far preferable to his son. The governor being unable to conceive what she meant by a

* "By the writings and tongues of all nations, particularly in the churches, hath St. Agnes been praised, who overcame the tenderness of her age and the cruelty of the tyrant, and sanctified the honour of her chastity with the glory of martyrdom."—*St. Jerome.*

"Divine Spouse," one of the gentlemen in waiting said to him : "That young lady is a Christian, and the Divine Spouse to Whom she refers is none other than the God of the Christians." Hereupon the governor, changing his tone, told her that she should abandon that sect and its maxims altogether, or else not only lose the good fortune which now presented itself, but be exposed to infamy and the most cruel torments. He concluded by giving her four-and-twenty hours to consider whether, under these circumstances, she would obstinately continue to be a Christian. Agnes boldly replied that she required no time for deliberation, as she was already resolved to have no other spouse than Jesus Christ, and that neither torments or death could frighten her, as she was most anxious to lay down her life for Him.

The governor then thought to intimidate her by threatening to have her sent to an infamous place, to be there dishonoured, but the Saint replied : "My confidence is placed in Jesus Christ, my Spouse, Who is Omnipotent —He will defend me from all outrage." Enraged at this answer, Symphronius ordered her to be handcuffed, and dragged in chains before the idols, that she might offer incense, but on arriving at the place, she made the Sign of the Cross, declaring that her Crucified Spouse alone should be adored. She was then led, by force, to a wicked house. But anyone who approached her with an immodest intent, became so overawed as not to be able to look at the Saint. Only one rash young man, whom some suppose to have been Procopius, attempted to offer her violence; but as Cardinal Orsi here observes, the impure wretch soon experienced the jealously with which the "Spouse of Virgins" defends them, for a flash of lightning struck him blind, and he fell as if dead upon the ground. While his companions were endeavouring to afford him some relief and were already bewailing him as dead, the Saint was requested to pray for him, and this she did; whereupon he instantly recovered and again received his sight.

The governor, surprised at this miracle, was inclined to dismiss the holy virgin; but the idolatrous priests

exclaimed that it was the effect of magic, and excited the people to demand that Agnes should be put to death as a witch. The governor, fearing a sedition if he should discharge her, and, on the other hand, being unwilling to put her to death, left the judgment of the case to his lieutenant, Aspasius, who being forced to it by the populace, condemned her to be burned alive. The funeral pile was according erected, the Saint was placed upon it and the fire kindled; but the flames, respecting her person, divided themselves on either side, and consumed many of the idolaters who were assisting at the execution.

The priests and the people continued to cry out that it was the work of the devil, and compelled the lieutenant to send an executioner to behead her. The horror of such an execution caused even this minister of cruelty to turn pale, and, says St. Ambrose, he trembled to give the stroke. But the Saint animated him, saying: "Haste thee to destroy this my body, which could give pleasure to others to the offending of my Divine Spouse. Fear not to give me that death which to me shall be the commencement of eternal life." Having raised her eyes to Heaven, and besought Jesus Christ to receive her soul, this tender virgin received the stroke of death, and went to receive from her Saviour the palm of her triumph.

As early as the time of Constantine the Great, a church was erected in honour of St. Agnes, and her festival is celebrated twice a year by the Church—on the twenty-first of January, in honour of her earthly triumph; and on the 28th of the same month, in commemoration of her heavenly reward.*

* The martyrdom of St. Agnes took place, according to Ruinart, about the year 304. Her virginal body was religiously deposited in a place belonging to her parents. The following is contained in the Roman Breviary, January 28: "One night when the parents of the blessed Agnes were watching at her grave, she appeared to them in company with a band of virgins, and said to them: 'Father and mother, weep not for me as though I were dead; for now these virgins and I live together in Him Whose love was my whole life upon earth.' Some years afterwards, Constance, the daughter of the Emperor Constantine, being sick of an incurable ulcer, betook herself to the said grave, although she was not yet a Christian, and as she lay by it and slept, she seemed to hear the voice of Agnes saying to her: 'Constance, be of good courage; believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God, and He will make thee whole.' The princess being healed, was baptized along with many others of the emperor's family and household, and afterwards built over the grave of the blessed Agnes a church named in her honour."

Evening Meditation.

IN GOD ALONE IS FOUND TRUE PEACE.

I.

He that seeks peace in creatures will never find it, because no creatures are fitted to give satisfaction to the heart. God has created man for Himself Who is an infinite Good; wherefore God alone can content man. Hence it comes that many persons, though loaded with riches, honours and earthly pleasures, are never satisfied; they are ever seeking for more honours, more possessions, and more amusements; and, however many they obtain, they are always restless, and never enjoy a day of true peace. *Delight thou in the Lord, and he shall give thee the requests of thy heart.* (Ps. xxxvi., 4). When a person delights only in God, and seeks nothing but God, God Himself will take care to satisfy all the desires of his heart, and then he will attain the happy state of those souls who desire nothing but to please God.

Senseless are they who say: "Happy he who can employ himself as he likes! Who can command others! Who can take what pleasures he pleases!" It is madness. He alone is happy who loves God; who says that God alone is sufficient for him. Experience shows clearly that multitudes of persons who are called fortunate by men of the world because in possession of great riches and raised to great dignities, live a miserable life and never find rest.

But how is it that so many rich and titled people and princes, in the midst of the abundance of the goods of the world, do not find peace? And, on the other hand, how is it that so many good Religious who live retired in a cell, poor and hidden, pass their days so happily? How is it that so many Solitaries, living in a desert or a cave, suffering hunger and cold, yet rejoice with gladness? It is because they lean only on God, and God comforts them.

The peace of God surpasseth all understanding. (Phil. iv., 7). Oh, how the peace which the Lord gives those who love Him exceeds all the delights which the world can give! *O taste and see that the Lord is sweet.* (Ps. xxxiii., 9). O ye men of the world, cries the Prophet, why will ye despise the way of the Saints without having ever known it? Try it for once; leave the world, abandon it, and give yourself to God, and you will see how well He knows how to comfort you more than all the honours and delights of this world.

O my God, give me strength to separate myself from all the snares that draw me to the world. Grant that I may think of nothing but to please Thee.

II.

It is true that even the Saints meet with great troubles in this life, but they, resigning themselves to the will of God, never lose their peace. The lovers of the world seem now at times joyful, and at times sad, but in truth, they are ever restless and in a state of confusion. On the other hand, the lovers of God are superior to all adversity and to the changes of this world, and therefore they live in uniform tranquillity. The celebrated Cardinal Petrucci describes a soul that is wholly given to God: "It beholds all things around change into a thousand various forms, while within, the depths of its own heart ever united with God, continue changeless."

But he who would live ever united with God, and would enjoy a continual peace, must drive from his heart everything that is not God, and live as if he were dead to earthly affections.

Happy are they for whom God alone is sufficient! O Lord, give me grace that I may seek nothing but Thee, and ask for nothing but to love Thee and give Thee pleasure. For love of Thee I now renounce all earthly pleasures, I renounce all spiritual consolations. I desire nothing but to do Thy will and to give Thee pleasure. O Mother of God, recommend me to thy Son Who denies thee nothing.

Wednesday—Fourth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE JUST HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR AT DEATH.

Hell will not cease to attack and tempt even the Saints at the hour of their death. But it is also true that God will not cease to assist and multiply helps for His faithful servants. *The souls of the just are in the hands of God and the torment of death shall not touch them.* —(Wis. iii., 1).

I.

The souls of the just are in the hands of God. If God holds fast in His hands the souls of the just, who can snatch them from Him? It is true that hell does not cease to tempt and attack even the Saints at the hour of death; but it is also true that God does not cease to assist and to multiply helps for His faithful servants, whenever their danger is increased. "There is greater aid," says St. Ambrose, "where there is greater peril, because God is a Helper in due time." The servant of Eliseus was struck with terror when he saw the city encompassed with enemies; but the Saint inspired him with courage, saying: *Fear not, for there are more with us than with them.*—(4 Kings vi., 16). He then showed him an army of Angels sent by God to defend the city. The devil will come to tempt the dying Christian, but his Angel Guardian will come to strengthen him; his holy advocates will come. St. Michael whom God has appointed to defend His faithful servants in their last combat with hell, will come; the Divine Mother will chase away the devils and protect her servant; above

all, Jesus Christ will come to guard against every temptation of hell, the innocent or penitent sheep for whose salvation He gave His life. He will give that confidence and strength of which the soul will stand in need in that last struggle with its enemies. Hence, full of courage, it will say : *The Lord hath become my helper.*—(Ps. xxix., 11). *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?*—(Ps. xxvi., 1). God, says Origen, is more solicitous for our salvation that the devil is eager for our perdition ; for the Lord loves our souls far more than the devil hates them.

God is faithful, says the Apostle, *Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able.* (1 Cor. x., 13). But you will say : Many Saints have died with great fear of being lost. I answer : We have but few examples of persons who, after leading a holy life, died with fears for their eternal salvation. To purify them at the hour of death from some defect, God sometimes permits holy souls to be disturbed by such fears. But generally the servants of God have died with a joyful countenance. At death the Judgment of God excites fear in all; but if sinners pass from terror to despair, the Saints rise from fear to confidence. St. Antoninus relates that in a severe illness, St. Bernard trembled through fear of Judgment and was tempted to despair. But thinking of the merits of Jesus Christ, he drove away all fear, saying to his Saviour : *Thy wounds are my merits! Vulnera tua, merita mea!* St. Hilarion also was seized with fear; but he said : " Go forth my soul! What do you fear? For nearly seventy years you have served Christ, and are you now afraid of death?" My soul, what do you fear? Have you not served a God Who is faithful and knows not how to abandon at death the Christian who has been faithful to Him during life?

Ah, my Jesus, when will the day arrive on which I can say : My God, I can never lose Thee! When shall I see Thee face to face, and be sure of loving Thee with all my strength for eternity? Ah, my Sovereign Good, my only Love, as long as I have life I shall be in danger of offending Thee and of losing Thy grace. There was

an unhappy time when I did not love Thee, but on the contrary, despised Thy love. I am sorry for it with my whole soul, and hope that Thou hast already pardoned me. I now love Thee with my whole heart, and desire to do all in my power to love and please Thee.

II.

Father Joseph Scamacca, of the Society of Jesus, being asked if in dying he felt confidence in God, said : " Have I served Mahomet, that I should now doubt of the goodness of my God, or of His desire to save me ?"

Should the thought of having offended God at some time in the past molest us at death, let us remember that He has protested that He forgets the iniquities of all penitent sinners. *If the wicked do penance,—I will not remember all his iniquities.*—(Ezech. xviii., 21). But you may ask : How can I be sure of having received pardon from God ? St. Basil asks the same question : " How can any one be certain that God has forgiven his sins ?" " He can be certain of pardon," answers the Saint, " if he can say : I have hated and abhorred iniquity." He who detests sin can rest secure of having obtained pardon from God. The heart of man cannot exist without loving some object ; it must love creatures or God. If it loves not creatures, it loves God. And who are they that love God ? All who observe His commands. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.*—(Jo. xiv., 21). He, then, who dies in the observance of the Commandments, dies in the love of God, and he that loves fears not. *Charity casteth out fear.*—(1 Jo. iv., 18).

But I am still in danger of refusing Thee my love, O my Jesus, and of again turning my back upon Thee. Ah, Jesus, my Life, my Treasure, do not permit it ! Should this misfortune ever happen to me, take me this moment out of life by the most cruel of deaths. I am content to suffer such a death, and I entreat Thee to send me such a death, sooner than permit me ever to cease to love Thee. Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ, do not abandon me to so great an evil. Chastise

me as Thou wishest. I deserve and accept any chastisement Thou art pleased to inflict upon me; but preserve me from the punishment of seeing myself deprived of Thy grace and Thy love. My Jesus, recommend me to Thy Father. Mary, my Mother, recommend me to thy Son. Obtain for me perseverance in His friendship, and the grace to love Him, and then may He do with me according to His will.

Spiritual Reading.

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH.

5.—ST. VINCENT, DEACON.

(January 22).

St. Vincent, one of the most celebrated Martyrs of Spain, was born of a noble family in the city of Saragossa. While very young he was placed under the tutelage of Valerius, Bishop of that Church, who with great pains instructed him in the doctrines of religion, giving him at the same time a very extensive acquaintance with human sciences. Vincent having made wonderful progress in learning, was ordained deacon by this prelate who, being himself prevented from preaching by an impediment in his speech, entrusted this office to Vincent. The young Levite discharged this important duty with such success that many sinners and even pagans were converted by his discourses.

At that time, namely, in the year 303, Spain was under the rule of Maximian, and Dacian was governor of the province of Tarragona in which Saragossa was situated. Dacian was a most cruel man, and an unrelenting persecutor of the Christians. Hearing of the manner in which Vincent advanced the Christian Faith, he had him arrested, together with his Bishop, Valerius, and brought to Valencia, where he resided. He caused them to suffer much in prison, thinking that by maltreatment he would

render them easier to be conquered, but he soon perceived that this means did not correspond to the end he had in view. When brought into his presence, he first endeavoured by kindness to induce them to apostatize. To Valerius he represented that his declining age and infirmity required that repose which he might obtain by obeying the imperial edicts, but if he resisted he would feel the effects of their just anger. Then turning to Vincent he said : " You are young, and should not despise the reward of fortune which you may earn by abandoning your religion. Obey, young man, the commands of the emperors, and do not, by refusal expose yourself to an ignominious death."

Whereupon Vincent, turning to Valerius, who as yet had made no reply to the governor, said : " Father, if thou wilt, I shall answer for thee." The saintly bishop, resolved to suffer for Jesus Christ, replied : " Yes, my son, as I formerly entrusted to thee the preaching of God's holy word, I now charge thee to witness to our Faith." The holy deacon then declared to Dacian that they adored one only God, and could not worship the gods of the empire, who were devils, adding : " Do not think to shake our fortitude with threats of death or promises of reward, because there is nothing in this world which can be compared with the honour and pleasure of dying for Jesus Christ." Dacian irritated by such liberty of speech said to the holy deacon : " Either you must offer incense to the gods or you must pay with your life for the contempt you show." To this Vincent, raising his voice, replied as follows : " I have already told you that the greatest pleasure and the most distinguished honour that you can procure for us is to make us die for Jesus Christ. You may rest assured that you will grow weary of inflicting torments sooner than we of suffering them."

Dacian condemned Valerius to banishment, and resolved to wreak his vengeance upon Vincent.

He first caused him to be stretched upon the rack, by which horrid machine the Saint's arms and legs were so stretched, that the bystanders could hear the noise of the dislocation of the joints, which remained attached only by the stretched and torn sinews. Dacian perceived the

placid meekness with which the young Martyr endured his torments, and, as Fleury observes, heard him say, "Behold, what I have ever desired is now being accomplished! Behold the happy consummation of what I have always sighed for!" The tyrant hence concluded that the executioners were remiss in making him feel the torments, and caused them to be beaten with rods.

He then commanded that the sides of the Saint should be torn with iron hooks, until the ribs were visible; and knowing how much the pain would increase by allowing the wounds to cool, and then opening them afresh, he ordered this torture which was inflicted with great cruelty until the bowels appeared, and the blood flowed in torrents. Meanwhile, as Orsi relates, the Martyr insulted the tyrant, saying: "Since thy cruel ministers have exhausted their strength, come, thou chief butcher, and help them. Stretch forth thy wicked hands and slake thy thirst in my blood. Thou art deceived, thinking that torments can overcome my Faith—within me there is another man strengthened by God, whom thou canst not subdue."

Hereupon, seeing his constancy, Dacian ordered a cessation of his tortures, begging of the Saint, for his own sake, that if he persisted in refusing to sacrifice to the gods, he would at least give up the Sacred Books to be burned. Vincent answered that fire was not created by God to burn holy books, but to torture the wicked in hell. Nor did he hesitate to admonish him, that if he did not abandon the worship of idols, he would be one day condemned to eternal flames. The governor, more incensed than ever, condemned him to the most cruel of torments—that of being broiled on a species of grid-iron studded with sharp points. The Saint hearing this barbarous command, anticipated his executioners and walked with joy to the frightful engine. Such was his eagerness to suffer. Upon this gridiron the Saint was stretched at full length, bound hand and foot while the fire burned beneath. Red-hot plates of iron were placed on his mangled flesh, and his wounds were rubbed with salt which the activity of the fire forced deeper into his burned and lacerated body. In the midst of these tor-

tures the countenance of the Martyr evinced the inward consolation and joy of his soul, while, with eyes raised to Heaven, he blessed the Lord, and besought Him to receive his sacrifice. All admitted the prodigious fortitude with which God inspired the holy youth, and the pagans themselves declared that it was miraculous.

The effect the sight of such patience produced obliged Dacian to remove him from the public view. Yet not content with the tortures he had already inflicted, he caused him to be thrown into a dungeon, his feet placed very wide apart in wooden stocks, the pain of which was so great that many Martyrs died under it. His body was then stretched upon potsherds which, opening his wounds afresh, caused the most painful anguish. In order to weary his patience, strict orders were given that no one should be admitted to see or offer him the least consolation; but the Saint at midnight perceived his dungeon illuminated by a celestial light, and perfumed by a heavenly odour. The Lord then sent His Angels to console him, to intimate that his tortures were at an end, and to assure him of the reward of his fidelity. The jailers, being awakened by the splendour of the light, approached, and heard the Martyr in concert with the Angels rendering praises to the Lord. They believed and professed the Christian Faith.

Dacian being informed of this, ordered that the Saint should be removed from prison to a soft bed, and that his wounds should be healed, with the intention of renewing his torments when he would be sufficiently recovered to bear them. The faithful being permitted to visit and console him, kissed his wounds and absorbed the blood in their napkins which they preserved as most precious relics. But the time for our Saint's triumph had arrived, and he expired in the embraces of his brethren; while his soul was wafted by the Angels who had assisted him to the regions of everlasting bliss.

The tyrant on hearing of his death commanded that his body should be exposed to be devoured by wild beasts; but a raven was sent by God to defend it with its claws and beak, even against a wolf that had come to devour it. Dacian having exhausted his malice, ordered

that the body should be put in a sack weighted with stones and cast into the sea. But there is no power against the Lord. The body floated like a feather on the water and was carried by the waves as far as Valencia. The mariners tried to get possession of it, but before they could reach it, it was carried by the waves to the sea-shore and covered with sand.

The Saint afterwards appeared to a pious lady named Ionica, and indicated the place where his body lay. She went there accompanied by other Christians, and finding the relics deposited them in a little chapel. After the persecution had ceased, they were translated to a magnificent church outside the walls of Valencia, where they have always been regarded with devout veneration. St. Augustine attests that at his time the feast of St. Vincent was celebrated with a special joy in all the countries whither the Christian religion had penetrated.

Evening Meditation.

WE OUGHT TO HAVE GOD ALONE IN VIEW.

I.

In all our actions we should have no other end in view than the good pleasure of God,—not the pleasure of relatives, friends, great people, or ourselves. because whatever is not done for God is lost. Many things are done for the sake of pleasure, or in order not to displease men; but, says St. Paul: *If I yet please men, I should not be the servant of God.*—(Gal. i., 10). God alone must be regarded in everything we do, so that we may say, as Jesus Christ said, *I do always the things that please him.*—(Jo. viii., 29). It is God Who has given us everything we have; we have nothing of our own except nothingness and sin. It is God alone Who has truly loved us. He has loved us from eternity, and He has loved us so far as to give Himself for us upon the Cross and in the Sacrament of the Altar. God alone, therefore, deserves all our love.

Unhappy is the soul that looks with affection upon any object on earth which displeases God. It will never know peace in this life, and it is in imminent peril of never enjoying peace in the next. But happy is he, O my God, who seeks Thee alone, and renounces everything for Thy love. He will find the pearl of Thy pure love, a jewel more precious than all the treasures and kingdoms of the earth. He that does this obtains the true liberty of the sons of God, for he finds himself freed from all the bonds that would bind him to earth and hinder him from uniting himself to God.

My God and my All, I prefer Thee to all the riches of the world, to honours, to knowledge, to glory, and to all gifts that Thou couldst give me. Thou art all my Good. Thee alone I desire and nothing more, for Thou alone art infinitely beautiful, infinitely kind, infinitely worthy of love, in a word, Thou art the only Good. Wherefore every gift that is not Thyself is not enough for me. I repeat, and I will ever repeat it, I desire Thee alone and nothing more; and whatever is less than Thee, I say it again, is not sufficient for me.

II.

Let men undeceive themselves,—all good things that come from creatures are but dust, smoke, deceit. God alone can satisfy them. But in this life He does not grant us to enjoy Him fully; He only gives us certain foretastes of the good things which He promises us in Heaven. There He waits to satisfy us with His own joy when He will say to us: *Enter into the joy of thy Lord* —(Matt. xxv., 21). The Lord gives spiritual consolations to His servants, only to make them yearn for that happiness which He prepares for them in Paradise.

Oh, when will it be given me to occupy myself solely in praising Thee, O God, and loving Thee, and pleasing Thee, so that I shall no more think of the creature, nor even of myself? O my Lord and my Love, help me when Thou seest me growing cold in Thy love, and in danger of giving my affection to creatures and to earthly goods.

Stretch forth thy hand from on high, take me out, and deliver me from many waters.—(Ps. cxliii., 7). Deliver me from the danger of wandering far from Thee.

Let others seek what they will; I desire nothing but Thee, my God, my Love and my Hope: *What have I in heaven, and besides thee what do I desire upon earth? Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever.*—(Ps. lxxii., 25).

O Almighty God, O God worthy of love, grant that in all things we may henceforth love and seek nothing but Thy pleasure. Grant that Thou mayest be our only Love, since Thou alone doth out of justice and gratitude, deserve all our affections. No greater pain afflicts me than the thought that in times past I have so little loved Thy infinite goodness. But I desire and resolve with Thy help, to love Thee with all my strength for the time to come, and thus I hope to die, loving Thee alone, my sovereign Good. O Mary, Mother of God, pray for me, a miserable being. Thy prayers are never refused. Pray to Jesus that He may make me all His own.

Thursday—Fourth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE JUST DIE IN A SWEET PEACE.

In the sight of the unwise the servants of God appear to die, as worldlings do, with sorrow and reluctance. But God knows how to console His children even in the midst of the pains of death. *In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, and their departure was taken for misery, and their going away from us for utter destruction; but they are in peace.*—(Wis. iii., 1).

I.

The souls of the just are in the hands of God. . . . In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, and their departure was taken for misery. In the sight of the unwise the servants of God appear to die, as worldlings do, with sorrow and reluctance. But God knows well how to console His children in their last moments; and, even in the midst of the pains of death, He infuses into their souls certain sweetnesses, as a foretaste of Paradise, which He will soon bestow upon them. As they who die in sin begin to experience on the bed of death a certain foretaste of hell, remorse and terrors and fits of despair, so, on the other hand, the Saints, by the frequent acts of Divine love which they then make, by their ardent desire and firm hope of soon possessing God, begin to feel that peace they will afterwards fully enjoy in Heaven. To the Saints death is not a punishment, but a reward.

When he shall give sleep to his beloved, behold the inheritance of the Lord.—(Ps. cxxvi., 2). The death of the Christian that loves God is called, not *death*, but *sleep*. Thus he shall be able to say : *In peace in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest.*—(Ps. iv., 9).

Father Suarez died with so much peace, that in his last moments he exclaimed : " I could never imagine that death would be so sweet." When Cardinal Baronius was advised by his physician not to fix his thoughts so much on death, he said : " Perhaps you think I am afraid of death. I fear it not, but on the contrary, I love it." In going to death for the Faith, the Cardinal of Rochester put on his best clothes, saying that he was going to a nuptial feast. Hence, at the sight of the scaffold he threw away his staff and said : *Ite, pedes; parum a Paradiso distamus! Hasten, O my feet! We are not far from Paradise!* Before death he intoned the " Te Deum," to thank God for giving him the grace to die a Martyr for the holy Faith; and, full of joy, he laid his head on the block.

Ah, my supreme Good, my God, if in the past I have not loved Thee, I now turn to Thee with my whole soul. I take leave of all creatures, and choose Thee, my most

amiable Lord, for the sole object of my love. Tell me what Thou wishest of me : I will do all Thou desirest. I have offended Thee enough : I wish to spend all the remaining moments of life in pleasing Thee.

II.

St. Francis of Assisi began to sing at the hour of death and invited his brethren to join with him. Brother Elias said to him : " Father, at death we ought to weep rather than sing." " But," replied the Saint ," I cannot refrain from singing, for I see that I shall soon go to enjoy my God." A young nun of the order of St. Teresa, in her last illness said to her sisters in Religion who stood round her bed bathed in tears : " O God, why do you weep ? I go to enjoy my Jesus. If you love me, rejoice with me !"

Father Granada relates that a certain huntsman found a solitary infected with leprosy, singing in his last agony. " How," said he, " can you sing in such a state ?" " Brother," replied the hermit, " between me and God there is nothing but the wall of this body. I now see that my flesh is falling off—that the prison walls will soon be destroyed, and that I shall go to see my God. It is for this reason that I rejoice and sing." The desire of seeing God made St. Ignatius the Martyr say that if the wild beasts should not take away his life he would provoke them to devour him. St. Catherine of Genoa could not bear to hear death called a misfortune. Hence she would say : " Oh, beloved Death, in what mistaken light are you viewed ! Why do you not come to me ? I call on you night and day !" St. Teresa desired death so vehemently that she regarded as death the continuation of life. Hence she composed the celebrated hymn,—*I die because I do not die*. Such is death to the Saints.

Give me grace, O my God, to compensate by my love for my past ingratitude which has continued to this moment. I deserve to burn in the fire of hell for so many years ; Thou hast sought after me, and hast drawn me to Thyself. Make me now burn with the fire of Thy holy love. I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness ! Thou

justly claimest all the affections of my heart; for Thou hast loved me more than all others have loved me. Thou alone deservest my love; Thee only do I wish to love. I desire to do everything in my power to please Thee. Do with me whatsoever Thou wishest. For me it is enough to love Thee and to be loved by Thee. Mary, my Mother, assist me. Pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading.

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH.

6.—ST. POLYCARP, BISHOP OF SMYRNA.

(January 26)

St. Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle St. John, and was born about the seventieth year of the Christian Era. He was a Christian from his infancy, and on account of his extraordinary piety was greatly beloved by the Apostles, his teachers. St. Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons, writes that he had had the good fortune, when young, to know our Saint who was then far advanced in years, and remarks how strongly impressed on his mind were the instructions he had received from him, and with what delight he remembered having heard him recount his conversations with St. John and others who had seen the Redeemer.

St. Polycarp was consecrated Bishop of Smyrna by St. John himself before this Apostle's banishment to the Island of Patmos. It is looked upon as certain that our Saint was *the Angel* (or Bishop) of Smyrna, commended by Our Lord in the Apocalypse: *And to the angel of the church of Smyrna write . . . I know thy tribulation and thy poverty; but thou art rich. . . . Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life.*—(Apoc. ii., 9, 10).

Our Saint governed the church of Smyrna seventy years, with so much prudence and authority that he was

regarded as the principal of the Asiatic bishops, on account of the great veneration in which he was held. When eighty years of age, he went to Rome to consult with Pope Anicetus on some points of discipline, particularly regarding the time at which Easter should be celebrated. St. Polycarp's delay in Rome was very useful to the faithful, as it afforded him an opportunity of confuting the heresies of that period. He there met the heresiarch, Marcion, who inquired of the holy bishop whether he knew him. "Yes," answered the Saint, "I know thee to be the first-born of the devil."

On his return to Asia, he suffered much in the persecution which the Emperor Marcus Aurelius raised against the Church, and which was particularly felt at Smyrna, where the proconsul, Statius Quadratus, was exercising the most barbarous cruelty against the faithful. Amongst other acts of persecution, he caused twelve Christians who were brought from Philadelphia, to be devoured by wild beasts. Excited by this bloodshed, the pagans were loud in their demands for the slaughter of the Christians, particularly Polycarp who failed not on his part to encourage his flock to the most heroic proofs of constancy, in suffering torments and death for Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding the continual clamour raised against him, the Saint wished to remain in the city for the discharge of his pastoral duties, but was obliged, by the importunity of the faithful, to retire to a house without the city, where, during his stay, he occupied the entire night and day in holy prayer.

After a short time, however, he was discovered. Three days previous to his arrest, he saw in a vision his pillow in flames, from which he knew that the Martyrdom reserved for him was that of fire, and, turning to his companions, told them that he would be burned alive. The Christians, aware that the soldiers were in pursuit of him, removed him to another house; but a young servant, overawed by the fear of torture, revealed the place of his concealment. The Saint was informed of this, but refused to retreat any farther, saying, with holy resignation: "The will of God be done!" Full of heroic zeal, he offered himself to God as a victim destined for

His honour, besought Him to accept the sacrifice of his life, and joyfully delivered himself up to his pursuers. He received them into his house, ordered them a handsome supper, and desired only some time for prayer, which being granted, he was for two hours absorbed in meditation.

The captain and soldiers were filled with confusion at the sight of the venerable bishop, and, unwillingly executing their commission, departed with him at break of day. As the journey to Smyrna was long, they set him on an ass, and were conducting him to the city when they met on the road two superior officers, called Herod and Nicetas, who took him into their chariot, and endeavoured to persuade him to obey the imperial edict, saying, among other things : " What wrong is there in sacrificing to the gods in order to save your life?" The Saint answered with fortitude that he would rather suffer every torture, even death itself, than consent to what they advised. Upon this resolute answer they turned away in anger, regarding him as a man lost through his obstinacy, and pushed him from the chariot with such violence that his leg was bruised, or, according to Fleury, broken by the fall.

The Saint, nevertheless, with undisturbed tranquillity of mind, proceeded to the amphitheatre where he was about to sacrifice his life. Upon entering it he heard a voice from Heaven saying : " Be courageous, Polycarp, and act manfully." He was presented to the proconsul who endeavoured to shake his resolution, saying : " Polycarp, thou art old, and should free thyself from torments which thou hast not strength to bear. Swear, therefore, by the fortune of Cæsar, and exclaim with the people : ' Be the impious exterminated !' " The Saint immediately replied : " Yes, be the impious exterminated. But by the impious I mean the idolaters." The proconsul, thinking that he had gained him over, said : "Now blaspheme Jesus Christ, and I will discharge thee. " The Saint rejoined : " I have served Jesus Christ these four score and six years; He never did me harm, but much good; how, then, can I blaspheme Him? How can I blaspheme my Creator and my Saviour, Who is

also my Judge, and Who justly punishes those who deny Him?" The tyrant still continuing to tempt him to deny Jesus Christ, Polycarp replied that he was a Christian and considered it a glory to die for Christ.

The proconsul threatened him with wild beasts. "Call for them quickly," replied the Saint; "I cannot turn from good to evil. The beasts will help me to pass from mortal suffering to the glory of Heaven." "Then," said the tyrant, "thou shalt be burned alive." The Saint answered: "Thy fire only lasts a moment; there is another fire which is eternal, and of that I am afraid. Why dost thou delay to execute thy threats?" This he said with so much intrepidity, that the tyrant himself was struck with admiration. He ordered, however, a crier to make public proclamation that Polycarp had avowed himself a Christian; whereupon the entire multitude of pagans cried out: "Let this destroyer of our gods die!" The public shows having terminated, it was resolved that he should be burned alive, instead of being devoured by wild beasts.

The pile was prepared by the pagans, and also by the Jews, who were particularly active in offering themselves as executioners. Polycarp put off his garments, and seeing they were about to fasten him to the stake, said: "Leave aside these nails, He Who gives me fortitude to undergo this fire, will enable me to stand still without them." They therefore contented themselves with tying his hands behind his back, and placed him upon the pile whence raising his eyes to Heaven, the Saint prayed after the following manner: "I bless Thee, O God, for having vouchsafed to make me a partaker in the Passion of Jesus Christ Thy Son, by rendering me worthy to offer myself as a sacrifice to Thy honour, that I may be enabled to praise Thee in Heaven, and to bless Thee for all eternity." The pile was set on fire, yet the flames did not touch the body of the Saint, but formed, as it were, an arch around him, while his flesh exhaled a most fragrant odour. The pagans, exasperated to see that the fire had no effect, transfixed him with a spear, and such a quantity of blood issued from the wound as to extinguish the flames.

Thus did St. Polycarp terminate his triumph, about the year 160.

Evening Meditation.

WE MUST SUFFER EVERYTHING IN ORDER TO PLEASE GOD.

I.

This has been the one chief and dearest endeavour of all the Saints,—to desire with their whole heart to endure all toil, contempt and pain, in order to please God, and thus to please that Divine Heart which so much deserves to be loved, and loves us so much.

In this consists all perfection, and all the love of a soul for God, to seek always the pleasure of God, and to do that which is most pleasing to Him. Oh, blessed is he who can say with Jesus Christ : *I do always the things that please him.*—(Jo. viii., 29). And what greater honour, what greater comfort can a soul have than to go through some fatigue, or to accept some labour, believing it to be acceptable to God ?

It is more than a duty that we should give pleasure to that God Who has so much loved us, and has given us all that we possess. And not content with giving us so many blessings, He has gone so far as to give Himself for us on the Cross, dying upon it for love of us ; and moreover, He instituted the Sacrament of the Altar, where He gives Himself wholly to us in Communion, so that He has no more that He can give.

On this account the Saints knew not what more they could do, in order to give pleasure to God. How many young nobles have left the world in order to give themselves wholly to God ! How many young maidens, even of royal blood, have renounced marriage with the great in order to shut themselves up in a cloister ! How many anchorites have gone to hide themselves in deserts and caves in order to meditate upon God alone ! How many

Martyrs have embraced scourges and fiery plates, and the most cruel torments of tyrants, in order to please God! In a word, in order to give pleasure to God, the Saints have stripped themselves of their possessions, have renounced the greatest earthly dignities, and have accepted as treasures infirmities, persecutions, the loss of property, and a death the most painful and desolate.

II.

The good pleasure of God, therefore, if we truly love it, must be preferred by us to the acquisition of all riches, the loftiest glory, and all the delights of earth and even Paradise itself; for it is certain that all the Blessed, if they were to know that it would please God more that they should burn in hell,—one and all, even the Mother of God among them, would cast themselves into that abyss of flames, and suffer eternally in order to give greater pleasure to God.

For this end the Lord has placed us in the world, in order that we may devote ourselves to pleasing Him, and giving Him glory. Wherefore the will of God ought to be the one object of all our desires, of all our thoughts and actions. Well does that Heart deserve to be pleased in all things Which has so greatly loved us, and is so anxious for our good.

But how is it, O Lord, that instead of seeking to give Thee pleasure, I have ungratefully displeased Thee so often! Yet the abhorrence which Thou causest me to feel for the sins I have committed against Thee teaches me that Thou dost desire to pardon me. Pardon me, then, and suffer me not to be ungrateful to Thee any longer. Grant that I may conquer everything to give Thee pleasure. *In thee, O Lord, have I hoped; I shall not be confounded forever.*—(Ps. xxx., 2). O Queen of Heaven and my Mother, draw me wholly to God.

Friday—Fourth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT.
THE GUILTY SOUL BEFORE ITS JUDGE.

We must all be manifested before the Judgment Seat of Christ.—(2 Cor. v., 10).

Oh, how great will be the terror of the soul the first time it sees the Redeemer, and beholds His countenance full of wrath! *Who shall stand before the face of his indignation?* St. Bernard says that the sinful soul will suffer more at seeing the indignation of Jesus Christ than in hell itself.

I.

We must all be manifested before the Judgment seat of Christ.

It is the common opinion of Theologians, that the Particular Judgment takes place at the very moment of death; and that on the very spot where the soul is separated from the body, it is judged by Jesus Christ Who will not send another, but will come Himself to judge it according to its works. *At what hour you think not the Son of man will come.*—(Luke xii., 40). "He will," says St. Augustine, "come in love to the good, in terror to the wicked." Oh! how great will be the terror of the soul the first time it sees the Redeemer and His countenance full of wrath! *Who*, says the Prophet Nahum, *shall stand before the face of his indignation?*—(i., 6). This thought made Father Louis de Ponte tremble so as to shake the walls of the cell in which he lay. Hearing the

Dies Iræ sung, and reflecting on the terror of the soul when it is presented before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, the Venerable Juvenal Ancina took the resolution of forsaking the world. And this resolution he carried out. The sight of the wrath of the Judge will announce the sentence. *The wrath of the king is as messengers of death.*—(Prov. xvi., 14). St. Bernard says that the soul will suffer more in seeing the indignation of Jesus Christ than in hell itself. When taken before an earthly judge, criminals have been known to perspire with a cold perspiration. Such was the confusion which Piso felt at the thought of having to appear as a criminal before the Senate, that he killed himself. How great is the pain of a child, or of a vassal, in appearing before an angry parent or an enraged sovereign! Oh, how much greater will be the pain and confusion of the soul when it beholds Jesus Christ enraged against it for the insults it offered to Him during life! *They shall look upon him whom they have pierced.*—(Jo. xix., 37). The soul will see in wrath the Lamb that bore with it so patiently during life, and that there is no hope of appeasing His anger. This will make the soul call upon the mountains to fall upon it to hide it from the fury of *the wrath of the Lamb.*—(Apoc. vi., 16). Speaking of Judgment, St. Luke says: *Then they shall see the Son of man.*—(Luke xxi., 27). Oh! what pain will the sight of the Judge in the form of man excite in the soul of the sinner! The sight of a Man-God Who died for his salvation will upbraid him with his ingratitude.

O my Jesus, I will always call Thee *Jesus*! Thy Name consoles and encourages me, because it reminds me that Thou art my *Saviour* Who didst die for my salvation. Behold me at Thy feet. I acknowledge that I have deserved hell as often as I have offended Thee by mortal sin. I am unworthy of pardon, but Thou hast died to merit pardon for me. Pardon me, then, immediately, O my Jesus, before Thou comest to judge me. I shall not then be able to ask pardon: I can now ask it from Thee, and I hope for it.

II.

When the Saviour ascended into Heaven, the Angels said to the disciples : *This Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come as you have seen him going into heaven.*—(Acts i., 11).

With the same Wounds with which He ascended into Heaven, Jesus Christ will come to judge the soul. The Wounds of the Redeemer will console the just and terrify the wicked. When Joseph said to his brothers, *I am Joseph, whom you sold*, the Scripture tells us that, through fear, they were silent and unable to utter a word. *His brethren could not answer him, being struck with exceeding great fear.*—(Gen. xlv. 3). Now, what answer will the sinner make to Jesus Christ? Will he dare to ask mercy when he must first render an account of his abuse of the mercy he has received? " With what face," says Eusebius Emissenus, " will you, who are to be first judged for contempt of mercy, ask for mercy?" What, then, will become of the sinner? Where, says St. Augustine, will he fly? He will behold an angry Judge above; hell open below; on one side his own sins accusing him; on the other, the devils ready to inflict chastisement; and within, remorse of conscience. " Above shall be an enraged Judge; below, a frightful chaos; on the right, sins accusing him; on the left, the devils dragging him to punishment; within, a burning conscience. Beset in this manner, whither will the sinner fly !"

Thy Wounds, my Jesus, will then fill me with terror, but now they give me confidence. My dear Redeemer, I am sorry above all things for having offended Thy infinite goodness. I purpose to submit to every pain, every loss, rather than forfeit Thy grace. I love Thee with my whole heart. Have pity on me. *Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy.* O Mary, Mother of Mercy, obtain for me a great sorrow for my sins, pardon, and perseverance in Divine love. I love thee, O my Queen, and trust in thee.

Spiritual Reading.

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH.

7.—ST. FRUCTUOSUS BISHOP OF TARRAGONA, AND HIS TWO DEACONS, ST. AUGURIUS AND ST. EULOGIUS.

(January 21).

The Acts of these Martyrs, as found in Ruinart, relate that in the year 259, under the Emperors Valerian and Gallien, Bishop Fructuosus of Tarragona, in Spain, with his two deacons, Augurius and Eulogius, were apprehended by order of Emilian, the governor of the province.

The holy prelate had retired to his room when the soldiers came to arrest him. On hearing the noise he opened the door; and being informed that the governor had summoned him and his two deacons, he said: "We are ready; but if you will permit me, I will put on my shoes." This done, the three Confessors were led to prison.

After six days' imprisonment they were brought before the governor who, turning to Fructuosus, said: "Hast thou heard that which the Emperors have commanded?" The Saint replied: "I know it not; but this I know, that I am a Christian." Emilian: "They have commanded that the gods be honoured." Fructuosus: "For my part, I adore only One God, Who hath made Heaven and earth." Emilian: "Art thou not aware of the existence of the gods?" Fructuosus: "I am not." Emilian: "Shortly thou shalt be. To what will men render homage, if they adore not the gods and the images of the emperors?" Then turning to Augurius, the deacon, he said: "Give no ear to the words of Fructuosus." Augurius replied: "I adore One Omnipotent God." The governor then turned to Eulogius and said: "Perhaps thou also adorest Fructuosus?" The deacon replied: "No; I adore him not; but I adore the same

God Whom he worships." The governor, then turning to Fructuosus, asked him : " Art thou the bishop ?" The Saint replied : " Yes, I am." Emilian said : " Thou shouldst have rather said : 'I have been,' for thou shalt be so no longer. I condemn you all three to the flames."

Whilst St. Fructuosus and his deacons were being led to the amphitheatre to undergo their sentence, the people, moved to compassion for the venerable bishop who was beloved not only by the faithful, but even by the idolaters, presented him a cup, requesting him to drink and be strengthened ; but he refused, saying, that it was not yet the hour for breaking the fast.* When they arrived at the amphitheatre, the Saint appeared filled with a tranquil joy. His Lector, Augustalis, came to him weeping, and begged he would permit him to take off his shoes. " No, my son," replied the holy bishop, " allow me to take them off myself ; for the certainty which I have of the Divine promises gives me sufficient strength." Having taken off his shoes, one of the faithful took him by the hand and desired he would remember him in his prayers. The Saint replied : " I am bound to pray for the whole Catholic Church from East to West." By these words, as St. Augustine observes, he wished to signify that each one of the faithful becomes a participator in all the prayers of the Church.

When he was about to receive the crown of Martyrdom he raised his voice, as the Acts relate, and said to the Christians : " Be not afraid ; you shall not be left without a pastor, for the love and the promises of the Lord never fail. That which you see me now about to suffer is the pain only of an hour." Having said these words, he was, together with his companions, encircled with fire ; but the Lord so disposed it, that the flames consumed only the bands with which their hands were tied ; wherefore, being at liberty to stretch forth their arms, they prostrated themselves in prayer, and raising their hands to Heaven besought the Almighty to allow the fire to consume them,

* This fast, called *The Fast of the Stations*, was kept on Wednesdays and Fridays. It was not broken till about three o'clock in the afternoon, and it was then ten o'clock in the morning.—Ed.

that their sacrifice might be completed. The Lord vouchsafed to hear their prayers, and placidly expiring, they went to receive the reward of their Martyrdom.

After their death, God was pleased to glorify His servants by manifesting their triumph to two Christians, Babylas and Mygdone, domestics of the governor. These saw the heavens open, and St. Fructuosus between his two deacons, surrounded with a halo of glory and ascending to receive their crowns. They called Emilianus to witness the ascent into Heaven of those whom he had that day condemned; but he was unworthy of the heavenly vision.

The faithful, who were exceedingly afflicted at the death of their pastor, came in the night to the amphitheatre, extinguished the smouldering remains of the fire, and were carrying away the bones of the Martyrs; but the holy bishop appeared to them, and commanded that all the relics should be buried together.

The Acts of these Martyrs terminate with the following devout aspiration: "O Blessed Martyrs, like gold, they have been tried in the furnace, and found worthy a crown of everlasting glory! To this crown their example invites us also!" St. Augustine, in a sermon delivered on the Anniversary of these Martyrs, observes that from the fact that they have attained to such glory, although being men of the same condition that we are, we should hope to overcome all the obstacles to our salvation, through the grace of Jesus Christ Who can render that easy which our weakness looks upon as insuperable.

Evening Meditation.

"*HE WAS OFFERED BECAUSE IT WAS HIS OWN WILL.*"—(Is. liii., 7).

I.

The Incarnate Word, at the moment of His conception, saw before Him all the souls He was to redeem. Then thou also, my soul, wast presented with the guilt of all

thy sins upon thee, and for thee did Jesus Christ accept all the pains that He suffered in life and death; and in doing so He obtained for thee thy pardon and all the graces thou hast received from God—the lights, the calls of His love, the helps to overcome temptations, the spiritual consolations, the tears, the compassionate feelings thou hast experienced when thinking of the love He had for thee, and the sentiments of sorrow in remembering how thou hast offended Him.

Thou didst, then, my Jesus, from the very beginning of Thy life, take upon Thee all my sins, and didst offer Thyself to satisfy for them by Thy sufferings. By Thy death Thou didst deliver me from eternal death: *But thou hast delivered my soul, that it should not perish; thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.*—(Is. xxxviii., 17). Thou, my Love, instead of punishing me for the insults which I have added to those that Thou hadst already received, hast gone on adding to Thy favours and mercies towards me, in order to win my heart one day to Thyself. My Jesus, this day has come; I now love Thee with all my soul. Who should love Thee if I do not? This is the first sin, my Jesus, that Thou hast to forgive me, that I have been so many years in the world without loving Thee. But for the future I will do all I can to please Thee. By Thy grace I feel a great desire to live for Thee alone, and to detach myself from all created things. I have also a great sorrow for the displeasure I have caused Thee. This desire and this sorrow, O my Jesus, are all Thy gift. Continue, then, my Love, to keep me faithful in Thy love, for Thou knowest my weakness. Make me all Thine as Thou hast made Thyself all mine. I love Thee, my only Good; I love Thee, my only Love; I love Thee, my Treasure, my All; my Jesus, I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee. Help me, O Mother of God.

II.

Behold, my Redeemer, to what Thy love for men has brought Thee—even to dying of sorrow on a Cross, drowned in a sea of grief and ignominy, as David had

predicted of Thee. *I am come into the depth of the sea, and a tempest hath overwhelmed me.*—(Ps. lxviii., 3). St. Francis de Sales writes thus : " Let us contemplate this Divine Saviour stretched on the Cross as upon the Altar of His Glory, on which He is dying of love for us. Ah, why, then, do we not in spirit throw ourselves upon Him to die upon the Cross with Him Who has chosen to die there for the love of us? I will hold Him, we ought to say,—I will never let Him go. I will die with Him and will burn in the flames of His love. One and the same fire shall devour this Divine Creator and his miserable creature. My Jesus is all mine, and I am all His. I will live and die on His bosom. Neither life nor death shall ever separate me from my Jesus."

Yes, my dear Redeemer, I hold fast to Thy Cross. Touched with compassion I kiss Thy pierced feet. I am confounded, O Lord Jesus, at seeing the affection with which Thou hast died for me. Ah, accept me, and bind me to Thy feet that I may no more depart from Thee, and may from this day forward converse with Thee alone, and to Thee confide all my thoughts. In a word, may I henceforth so direct all my affections as to seek nothing but to love Thee and please Thee, always longing to leave this valley of dangers to go love Thee face to face with all my strength in Thy kingdom which is a kingdom of eternal love. In the meantime let me always live in sorrow for the offences I have committed against Thee, and always burning with love for Thee Who for love of me hast given Thy life. I love Thee, my Jesus, Who hast died for me. I love Thee, O infinite Lover. I love Thee, O infinite Love. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness. O Mary, Mother of beautiful love, pray to my Jesus for me.

Saturday—Fourth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

MARY IS THE HOPE OF ALL.

There is no sinner, however abandoned by God, for whom Mary will not obtain grace and mercy if he only invokes her aid. As the magnet attracts iron so she draws to herself and to God the hardest hearts. Oh, if sinners had only recourse to Mary with a determination to amend their lives who should ever be lost!

I.

Denis the Carthusian says that Mary is, in a special manner, the advocate of sinners, because the guilty stand in greater need of succour than the innocent; hence he calls her the advocate of all sinners who invoke her intercession. And before him, St. John Damascene called Mary "the city of refuge for all who fly to her." Hence St. Bonaventure says: "Poor abandoned sinners, do not despair, raise your eyes to Mary," and be comforted, trusting in the clemency of this good Mother, for she will rescue you from the shipwreck you have suffered and will conduct you to the haven of salvation. Let us, then, say with St. Thomas of Villanova: "O holy Virgin, since thou art the advocate of the miserable, assist us who are the most miserable of all." "Let us," says St. Bernard, "ask grace, and ask it through Mary." The grace that we have lost she has found, says Richard of St. Laurence; we, then, should go to her in order to recover it. When the Archangel Gabriel announced to Mary that God had chosen her to be the Mother of the Word, he said to her: *Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.*

—(Luke i., 30). But how can that be? Mary was never deprived of grace; on the contrary, she was always *full of grace*. How, then, could the Angel say that she had *found grace*? Cardinal Hugo answers, that she did not find grace for herself, because she always possessed it, but she found it for us who had miserably lost it. Hence he says that in order to recover it, we should go to Mary and say to her: O Lady, property should be restored to him who has lost it; the grace which thou hast found is not thine, for thou didst always possess it; it is ours, we have lost it; to us, then, thou shouldst restore it. "Sinners, who by sin have forfeited the Divine grace, run, run to the Virgin, and say to her with confidence: Restore to us our property which you have found."

Oh, if all sinners had recourse to Mary with a determination to amend their lives, who should ever be lost? They that have not recourse to Mary are lost. St. Bridget heard our Saviour say to His Mother: "You would show mercy even to the devil were he to ask it with humility." The proud Lucifer will never humble himself so far as to recommend himself to Mary; but were he to humble himself to this Divine Mother and ask her aid, she would not cast him off, but would deliver him from hell by her intercession. By this Jesus gives us to understand that Mary obtains salvation for all that have recourse to her.

II.

St. Basil calls Mary "a public hospital." Public hospitals are established for the poor that are afflicted with sickness, and the greater the poverty of the invalid, the stronger his claim to admission. Hence, according to St. Basil, Mary would receive with the greatest promptness the most abandoned sinners that have recourse to her. Ah! says St. Bernard, this great Queen feels no horror for any sinner, however great the stench of his sins. If the miserable man flies to her protection, she disdains not to stretch forth her hand and to rescue him from the state of perdition. Our Lord revealed to St. Catherine of Sienna, that He had chosen Mary to draw men, and particularly sinners, to His love. Mary herself

said to St. Bridget, that there is no sinner, however abandoned by God, for whom, if he invoke her aid, she will not obtain the grace to return to God, and find mercy. She also said that as the magnet attracts iron, so she draws to herself and to God the hardest hearts.

The holy Church wishes that we call this Divine Mother our Hope. *Hail, our Hope!* The impious Luther said that he could not bear to hear the Church teaching us to call Mary *our Hope*. God only, he said, is our Hope; and God Himself curses them that place their hopes in any creature. Yes, God curses those that trust in creatures independently of Him, but we hope in Mary as a mediatress with God. For, says St. Bernard, God has placed in the hands of Mary all the treasures of goods that He wishes to dispense to men. Hence the Lord wishes us to acknowledge that all good comes from Mary; for He has ordained that all the graces that He will give us should pass through her hands. St. Bernard called her his greatest confidence, and the entire ground of his hope. St. Bonaventure called Mary the salvation of them who invoke her. Hence according to St. Bonaventure, to be saved it is enough to invoke Mary. Whenever, then, the devil terrifies us with the fear of being lost, let us say to Mary with the same Saint: "In thee, O Lady, have I hoped; let me not be confounded forever!" In thee, after Jesus, I have placed all my hopes; thou hast to watch over my salvation, and to deliver me from hell. But, says St. Anselm, hell is not the lot of any true client of Mary for whom she prays even once, and says to her Son that she desires his salvation.

Spiritual Reading.

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH.

8.—ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE.

(January 27).

Although this great Saint did not actually die for the Faith at the hands of the executioner, yet he may be styled a Martyr, as he died of the maltreatment which he received defending God's honour and the rights of the Church.

St. John was born at Antioch about the year 347, and was descended from one of the most illustrious families of that city. His mother, being left a widow at the early age of twenty years, took particular care of the education of her two children, placing John under the most eminent masters, to study rhetoric and philosophy.* It was expected that the pious youth would attain to great worldly fortune; but from his twentieth year he applied himself to the study of the Sacred Scriptures and to prayer, and dedicated himself entirely to the service of his crucified Lord. Whereupon St. Meletius, his bishop, took a great liking to him, and having instructed him for three years, made him Lector of his own church.

Although during his stay in Antioch he led a very retired and mortified life, he bethought himself of the advantages of a still more solitary and austere state; and consequently retired to a cave where he passed some years in continual prayer and penitential practices, which were so severe as to injure his health. He was therefore obliged to return to Antioch, where he was ordained deacon by St. Meletius, whose successor, Flavinius, conferred upon him the Holy Order of Priesthood five years

* His mother, Anthusa, did not wish to marry again in order to devote herself entirely to the welfare of her children. She herself took care to instil into them the great principles of our holy Religion. "Never," says Alban Butler, "was a woman more worthy of bearing the name of mother." The pagans themselves could not help admiring her virtues; and a celebrated philosopher cried out while speaking of her: "What wonderful women are to be found amongst the Christians!"

afterwards. In consequence of his great eloquence, the Bishop appointed him preacher of that church. This office he discharged so well, that public demonstrations of approbation were frequently made, against which the Saint protested, saying: "What good can these your applauses do me? That only which I desire is that you practise what I preach,—this will be to me the most acceptable applause."

Nectarius, Patriarch of Constantinople, died in the year 397; and as the name of our Saint had obtained great celebrity throughout the entire Province, the Emperor Arcadius, the clergy and people, agreed in having him promoted to that see. The emperor accordingly summoned him to Constantinople, and without making known to him his design, took him into his carriage, and brought him to a church outside the city, where, notwithstanding his reluctance, he was consecrated by the bishops previously assembled.

The see of Constantinople had unfortunately been governed for sixteen years by Nectarius, a man without learning or zeal; so that this great city, containing as it did so many strangers and heretics, required a thorough reform. To this St. John Chrysostom gave his entire attention. With an untiring and holy zeal he laboured for the reformation of his clergy, and endeavoured to suppress the avarice and haughtiness of the emperor's court; this made for him many enemies.

It happened that there arrived at Constantinople some monks, who had been expelled from Egypt by Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, under the pretext of Origenism; but St. John, being convinced of their innocence, wrote to Theophilus in their favour, beseeching him not to disturb them. He, however, being a haughty and vindictive man, succeeded in raising a persecution against the Saint for protecting the monks. The emperor, however, summoned Theophilus to Constantinople, to account for his conduct; but he easily gained over to his side the nobles, bishops, and clergy, who were opposed to St. Chrysostom. But the greatest acquisition to his party was the Empress Eudoxia who bore a mortal enmity to our Saint, on account of having been rebuked

by him for her avaricious rapacity in depriving Callitropa of her money and another widow of her land. Backed by this party, Theophilus was enabled to get together a cabal of thirty-six bishops, who from the place where they met styled themselves the *Synod of the Oak*, and having drawn up some false accusations, deposed St. John from his bishopric, and obtained from the emperor a decree for his banishment.

The people, hearing of the decree, surrounded the church to defend their bishop; but St. John, to avoid a sedition, escaped through a private door, and surrendered himself to the guards, who brought him to Bithynia. On the night of the following day Constantinople was shaken with an earthquake, which was regarded by all, even by Eudoxia, as a sign of God's displeasure. In the greatest consternation she besought the emperor to recall the holy bishop. The entire population went out to meet him, chanting hymns, and bearing lighted torches in their hands, and having arrived at the Cathedral put him upon the episcopal throne.

Theophilus and his party having fled from Constantinople, the Saint resumed the discharge of his pastoral duties, and was treating with the emperor about the convocation of a council to vindicate his innocence, when a certain incident totally changed the aspect of affairs. In the square before the great church of St. Sophia a silver statue had been erected to the empress, where dances and public games were performed, which disturbed the sacred offices of the church. The Saint strongly rebuked the people for this irreverence; but his zeal only infuriated the Empress Eudoxia, who to satisfy her revenge availed herself of the enmity which Theophilus and other bishops bore our Saint. They formed a second cabal, in which they condemned and deposed St. Chrysostom, under pretext that he had reassumed the episcopal function without having justified himself in synod.

In pursuance of this most iniquitous deposition, an order came from the emperor that he should not enter his church, and he accordingly departed from the city. As this happened on Holy Saturday, the Saint retired to

a country chapel, in order to celebrate the sacred offices; but his enemies obtained a troop of four hundred soldiers, and entered the church, where Baptism was being administered, wounded some of the priests, and injured some of the children who were about to be baptized. Their sacrilegious impiety went so far as to trample on the Blessed Sacrament! Such, in fine, was the consternation, that many of the people ran to hide themselves in the woods and valleys.

Although the Emperor Arcadius had no personal enmity to St. John, he was induced by the importunity of his wife and the hostile bishops to send him into banishment. The Saint having received the order, took leave of the bishops who were his friends, and departing through a private door, delivered himself to the soldiers who obliged him to travel day and night on the journey into Armenia, the place of his banishment. The journey lasted seventy days, during thirty of which the Saint suffered from a tertian fever.

When they arrived the bishop received St. John into his house. He there found some repose after so much suffering. The Saint here did not remain idle, but employed himself, as much as possible, in instructing the people and relieving the poor. He also wrote many letters to console his friends, and to assist the churches which had been lately founded in Persia and Phœnicia.

Meanwhile, Pope Innocent I. having been informed of the injustice done to St. John, did all in his power to assemble a synod where the innocence of the Saint would be definitely declared. But his enemies laboured successfully to prevent a synod being held; and jealous also of the fame he was acquiring in his first place of exile, prevailed upon Arcadius to banish him to Pytius, a small town on the borders of the empire. St. John was accordingly consigned to two officers, one of whom was a most brutal man, who being instructed by the enemies of the Saint to cause his death by maltreatment on the road, obliged him to travel in the most violent rains and amid scorching heats, not allowing him to rest in any town, but halting at obscure villages, where no accommodation could be found.

When they arrived at Comana, in Pontus, the inhuman officer obliged him to continue his journey five or six miles to the church where St. Basiliscus, Martyr and Bishop of Comana, had been buried; they lodged in a house contiguous to the church, and in the night the holy Martyr appeared to St. John, and exhorted him to have courage, adding: "To-morrow we shall be together." St. Chrysostom, knowing thus that the termination of his sufferings was at hand, besought the soldiers to defer their departure till the morrow. This he could not obtain; but they had travelled only a few miles when, seeing the Saint about to expire, they returned to the same house. The Saint then changed his dress, putting on a white robe. He received the holy Viaticum, and poured forth his last prayer, which he concluded with the words he was constantly in the habit of using: "Glory be to God for all things!" Having said "Amen," he gave up his soul to God, on the 14th September in the year 407, being about sixty years of age, and having been bishop nine years and seven months. A great concourse of monks and persons of rank came from the neighbouring provinces to celebrate his funeral.

God did not delay the punishment of his enemies, and especially of Eudoxia, who died a few days afterwards. She was soon followed by Arcadius, who expired in his thirty-first year, and these deaths have generally been considered the effects of divine wrath.

In the year 428, the honours of a Saint were first given to St. John Chrysostom, and the archbishop, St. Proculus, afterwards persuaded the emperor, Theodosius the Younger, to bring the Saint's body from Comana to Constantinople. The translation of the sacred relics was performed with the utmost pomp, the entire population going forth to join in the procession. The sea over which they passed was covered with barges, and illuminated with torches. When the sacred relics arrived, the Emperor Theodosius, his eyes bathed in tears and fixed upon the coffin, humbly asked pardon of the Saint for the

injustice done to him by his parents. This translation took place on the 28th of January, in the year 438, thirty-one years after the Saint's death. The relics were in later times translated to Rome and placed in St. Peter's.

Evening Meditation.

JUDGMENT AFTER DEATH.

I.

It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment.—(Heb. ix., 27).

It is of Faith that, immediately after death we shall be judged according to our works in this life. And it is also of Faith, that upon this Judgment will depend our eternal salvation or perdition. Imagine yourself in your agony, and having only a short time to live. Think that in a short time you would have to appear before Jesus Christ to give an account of your whole life. Alas! how alarming would the sight of your sins then be to you!

Jesus, my Redeemer, pardon me, I beseech Thee, before Thou judgest me. I know that I have many times already deserved to be sentenced to eternal death. No, I desire not to present myself guilty before Thee, but penitent and pardoned. O my sovereign Good, I am grievously sorry for having offended Thee.

O God, what will be the anguish of the soul when it shall first behold Jesus Christ as its Judge, and behold Him terrible in His wrath? It will then see how much He has suffered for its sake; it will see what great mercies He has exercised towards it, and what powerful means He has bestowed upon it for the attainment of salvation; then will it also see the greatness of eternal goods, and the vileness of earthly pleasures which have wrought its ruin; it will then see all these things but to no purpose, because then there will be no more time to correct its

past errors. What shall have then been done will be irrevocable. Before the Judgment-seat of God, no nobility, nor dignity, nor riches will be considered; our works alone will be weighed there.

Grant, O Jesus, that when first I behold Thee I may see Thee appeased; and for this end, grant me the grace to weep during the remainder of my life, over the evil I have done in turning my back upon Thee to follow my own sinful caprices. No, I desire never more to offend Thee. I love Thee and desire to love Thee forever.

II.

What contentment will that Christian enjoy at the hour of death who has left the world to give himself to God; who has denied his senses all unlawful gratifications; and who, if he has on some occasions been wanting, has at last been wise enough afterwards to do worthy penance for it! On the other hand, what anguish will that Christian experience who has continually relapsed into the same vices, and at last finds himself at the point of death! Then will he exclaim: "Alas! in a few moments I must appear before Jesus, my Judge, and I have not yet even begun to change my life! I have many times promised to do so, but I have not done it. Now in a short time, what shall become of me?"

O, my Jesus and my Judge, I return Thee thanks for the patience with which Thou hast hitherto waited for me. How many times have I not written my own condemnation! Since Thou hast thus waited to pardon me, reject me not now that I am prostrate at Thy feet. Receive me into Thy favour through the merits of Thy bitter Passion. I am sorry, O my sovereign Good, for having despised Thee. I love Thee above all things. I desire never more to forsake Thee.

O Mary, recommend me to thy Son, Jesus, and do not abandon me.

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

"*GATHER UP FIRST THE COCKLE, AND BIND IT INTO BUNDLES TO BURN.*"—(Gospel of Sunday. Matt. xiii., 24, 30).

Behold the final doom of sinners who abuse the Divine Mercy,—to burn in the fire of hell! God threatens hell, not that He may send us there, but in order that He may deliver us from that place of torments. Oh, how ardently would the damned desire a day or an hour of the time granted to me!

I.

In committing sin the sinner does two evils. He abandons God, the Sovereign Good, and turns to creatures. *For my people have done two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns—broken cisterns—that can hold no water.*—(Jer. ii., 13). Since, then, by turning to creatures the sinner offends God, he will be justly tortured in hell by the same creatures, by fire and by devils. In this punishment consists the pain of sense. But because his greatest guilt and the malice of his sin consists in turning his back on God, his principal torment, his hell, will be the pain of loss, or the pain arising from having lost God.

It is of Faith, that there is a hell—a prison reserved for the chastisement of rebels against God. What is this hell? It is what the glutton who was damned called *a place of torments.*—(Luke xvi., 28). A place of torments where all the senses and powers of the damned will have their own particular torment, and where, the more a

person has offended God by any sense, the more he will be tortured in that sense. *By what things a man sinneth, by the same also he is tormented.*—(Wis. xi., 17). *As much as she hath glorified herself and lived in delicacies, so much torments and sorrow give ye to her.*—(Apoc. xviii., 7). The sight will be tormented with darkness. *A land*, says Job, *that is dark, and covered with the mist of death.*—(Job x., 21). How pitiable is the condition of a man shut up in a dark pit for forty or fifty years, or during his whole life! Hell is a dungeon closed up on every side, into which a ray of sun, or of any other light, shall never enter. *He shall never see the light.*—(Ps. xlviii., 20). The fire of this world sends forth light, but the fire of hell is utterly dark. *The voice of the Lord divided the fire.*—(Ps. xxviii., 7). In explaining these words, St. Basil says, that the Lord will separate the light from the fire, so that this fire will burn, but will not illuminate. Albert the Great expounds them more briefly, and says that God "will divide the flame from the heat." The very smoke that issues from that fire shall form a storm of darkness which, according to St. Jude, will blind the damned. *To whom the storm of darkness is reserved forever.* (Jude 13). St. Thomas teaches that the damned have only the light which serves to increase their torments. In that glimmering light they will see the deformity of their associates, and of the devils who will assume horrible forms in order to increase the terrors of the damned.

Ah, my Lord, behold at Thy feet one who has so much despised Thy grace and Thy chastisements! Miserable should I be, O my Jesus, if Thou hadst not taken pity on me. How many years should I be in that fetid furnace, in which so many of my companions are now burning! Ah, my Redeemer, why does not this thought make me burn with Thy love? How can I ever again think of offending Thee? Ah, my Jesus, may I never more displease Thee! Strike me dead a thousand times rather than permit me ever again to insult Thee. Since Thou hast begun, complete the work. Thou hast taken me out of the abyss of so many sins, and hast so lovingly called me to love Thee.

II.

The sense of smell will also be tormented. How painful to be confined in a close room along with a putrid corpse! *Out of their carcasses*, says the Prophet Isaias, *shall rise a stink.*—(Is. xxxiv., 3). The damned must remain in the midst of so many millions of the reprobate, who, though ever living and in pain, are called carcasses on account of the stench which they send forth. St. Bonaventure says that if the body of one of the damned were placed on this earth, it would, by its stench, be sufficient to cause the death of all men. And yet some will say: *If I am damned I shall not be alone.* Miserable fools! The greater the number of the damned in hell, the more insufferable will be their torments. "There," says St. Thomas, "the society of the reprobate will cause not a diminution, but an increase of misery." Their sufferings are more intolerable on account of the stench, on account of the shrieks of the damned, and on account of the narrowness of the place. In hell they will be one over the other, like sheep gathered together in the winter. *They are*, said David, *laid in hell like sheep.*—(Ps. xlviii., 15). They will be even like grapes pressed under the wine-press of God's wrath. *And he treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness of the wrath of God the Almighty.*—(Apoc. xix., 15). From this will arise the pain of immobility. *Let them become immovable as a stone.*—(Exod. xv., 16). Thus, in whatsoever position the damned will fall into hell after the Last Day, in that position they must remain, without ever changing and without ever being able to move hand or foot, as long as God shall be God.

The sense of hearing will be tormented by the ceaseless howling and wailing of those miserable beings who are sunk in an abyss of despair. The devils will torment the damned by continual noises. *The sound of dread is always in his ears.*—(Job xv., 21). How painful to a person longing for sleep to hear the groans of a sick man, the barking of a dog, or the screams of an infant! But, oh, how miserable the condition of the damned who must listen incessantly for all eternity to the clamour and cries

of the companions of their torments! The damned will be tormented by a ravenous hunger. *They shall suffer hunger like dogs.*—(Ps. lviii., 15). But they never shall have a morsel of bread. Their thirst will be so great that all the waters of the ocean would not be able to quench it; but they shall never be allowed a single drop. The rich glutton asked for a drop of water but he has not yet had it, and he never, never shall.

Ah, grant, my Jesus, that I may give to Thee all the time Thou now givest to me. How ardently would the damned desire a day or an hour of the time granted to me! And shall I continue to spend it in offending Thee? No, my Jesus, through the merits of that Blood which has hitherto delivered me from hell, do not permit it. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good, and because I love Thee I am sorry for having offended Thee. I wish never more to offend Thee, but to love Thee forever. Mary, my Queen and my Mother, pray to Jesus for me, and obtain for me the gift of perseverance and of His holy love.

Spiritual Reading.

"*BIND INTO BUNDLES TO BURN.*" *THE FIRE OF HELL.*

The vengeance on the flesh of the ungodly is fire and worms.—(Ecclus. vii., 19).

Fire and the remorse of conscience are the principal means by which God takes vengeance on the flesh of the wicked. Hence, in condemning the reprobate to hell, Jesus Christ commands them to go into eternal fire. *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.*—(Matt. xxv., 41). This fire, then, shall be one of the most cruel executioners of the damned.

Even in this life the pain of fire is the most terrible of all torments. But St. Augustine says, that compared

with the fire of hell, the fire of this earth is no more than a *picture* compared with the reality. St. Anselm teaches that the fire of hell as far surpasses the fire of this world, as real fire exceeds painted fire. The pain, then, produced by the fire of hell is far greater than that which is produced by our fire, because God has made the fire of this earth for man's use, but He has created the fire of hell purposely for the chastisement of sinners; and therefore, as Tertullian says, He has made it a minister of His justice. This avenging fire is always kept alive by the wrath of God. *A fire is kindled in my rage.*—(Jer. xv., 14).

And the rich man also died, and he was buried in hell.—(Luke, xvi., 22). The damned are buried in the fire of hell. Hence they have an abyss of fire below, an abyss of fire above, and an abyss of fire on every side. As fishes in the sea are surrounded by water, so the unhappy reprobates are encompassed by fire on every side. The sharpness of the pain of fire may be inferred from the circumstance that the rich glutton complained of no other torment. *I am tormented in this flame.*—(Luke xvi., 24).

The Prophet Isaias says that the Lord will punish the guilt of sinners with the *spirit of fire. If the Lord shall wash away the filth of the daughters of Sion . . . by the spirit of burning.*—(Is. iv., 4). The spirit of burning is the pure essence of fire. All spirits or essences, though taken from simple herbs or flowers, are so penetrating that they reach the very bone. Such is the fire of hell. Its activity is so great that a single spark of it would be sufficient to melt a mountain of bronze. The Disciple relates, that a damned person, who appeared to a Religious, dipped his hand into a vessel of water; the Religious placed in the vessel a candlestick of bronze and it was instantly dissolved.

This fire shall torment the damned not only externally, but also internally. It will burn the bowels, the heart, the brain, the blood within the veins, and the marrow within the bones. The skin of the damned shall be like a caldron, in which their bowels, their flesh, and their bones shall be burned. David says that the bodies of the

damned shall be like so many furnaces of fire. *Thou shalt make them as an oven of fire in the time of thy anger.*—(Ps. xx., 10).

O God, certain sinners cannot bear to walk under a strong sun, or to remain before a large fire in a close room; they cannot endure a spark from a candle; and they fear not the fire of hell, which, according to the Prophet Isaias, not only *burns* but *devours* the unhappy damned. *Which of you can dwell with devouring fire?* —(Is. xxxiii., 14). As a lion devours a lamb, so the fire of hell devours the reprobate; but it devours without destroying life, and thus tortures them with a continual death. Continue, says St. Peter Damien to the sinner who indulges in impurity, continue to satisfy your flesh; a day will come, or rather an eternal night, when your impurities, like pitch, shall nourish a fire within your very bowels. And according to St. Cyprian, the impurities of the wicked shall boil in the very fat which will issue from their accursed bodies.

St. Jerome teaches that in this fire sinners shall suffer not only the pain of the fire, but also all the pains which men endure on this earth. How manifold are the pains to which men are subject in this life! Pains in the side, pains in the head, pains in the loins, pains in the bowels. All these together torture the damned.

Evening Meditation.

LET US LABOUR FOR ETERNITY.

1.

Be ye ready: for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come.—(Luke xii., 40).

The time of death will not be the time to prepare ourselves to die well; to die well and happily, we must prepare ourselves beforehand. There will not be time then to eradicate bad habits from the soul, to expel from the

heart its predominant passions, and to extinguish all affection for earthly goods. *The night cometh when no man can work.*—(Jo. ix., 4). In death all will be night, when nothing will be seen, and hence, nothing done. The heart hardened, the mind obscured, confusion, fear, the desire of health, will render it almost impossible at the hour of death to set in order a conscience confused and entangled in sin.

O Sacred Wounds of my Redeemer, I adore you, I humbly kiss you, and I confide in you.

The Saints thought they did but little, though they spent their whole lives in preparing for death by acts of penance, prayer, and the practice of good works, and they trembled when they came to die. The Blessed John of Avila, although he had led a very holy life from his youth, when it was announced to him that he was about to die, made answer and said : " Oh that I had a little more time to prepare myself for death !" And what shall we say when the summons of death shall be brought to us ?

No, my God, I do not wish to die disquieted and ungrateful, as at present I should die, if death were to overtake me now. I desire to change my life, I desire to bewail my offences against Thee, I desire to love Thee with my whole heart. O Lord, help me, enable me to do something for Thee before I die,—for Thee Who hast died for the love of me.

II.

The time is short—(1 Cor. vii., 29), says the Apostle. Yes, we have but a short time in which to set our accounts in order. Hence the Holy Ghost admonishes us : *Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it quickly.* —(Eccles. ix., 10). Whatever thou art able to do to-day, put it not off till to-morrow ; for to-day is passing away, and to-morrow may bring death which will deprive thee of all means of doing good, or of amending what thou hast done amiss. Woe to me, if death shall find me still attached to this world !

Ah, my God, how many years have I lived at a distance from Thee ! And how hast Thou had so much

patience with me, in waiting for me and in calling me so often to repentance! I thank Thee, O my Redeemer, for Thy long forbearance, and I hope to thank Thee for it forever in Heaven. *The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever.* —(Ps. lxxxviii., 2). Hitherto I have not loved Thee, and have made little account of being loved or not being loved by Thee, but now I do love Thee with my whole heart. I love Thee above all things, more than I love myself, and I desire nothing so much as to be loved by Thee. And recollecting how I have despised Thy love I would willingly die of grief for having done so. Mary, my holy Mother, obtain for me the happiness of being faithful to God.

Monday—Fifth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

"*SEEK YE THE LORD WHILE HE MAY BE FOUND.*"

It is true that at whatsoever hour the sinner is converted, God promises pardon to him. But God has not promised that sinners will be converted at death. On the contrary, He has often protested that they who live in sin will die in sin. *Therefore, seek ye the Lord while He may be found.*—(Is. lv., 6).

I.

God unceasingly threatens sinners with an unhappy death. *Then shall they call upon me, and I will not hear.*—(Prov. i., 28). *Will God hear his cry when dis-*

tress shall come upon him?—(Job xxvii., 9). *I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock.*—(Prov. i., 26). According to St. Gregory, God laughs when He is unwilling to show mercy. *Revenge is mine, and I will repay them in due time.*—(Deut. xxxii., 35). The Lord pronounces the same threats in many other places; and yet sinners live in peace as securely as if God had certainly promised to give them at death, pardon and Paradise! It is true that at whatsoever hour the sinner is converted, God promises to pardon him. But He has not promised that sinners will be converted at death. On the contrary, He has often protested that they who live in sin shall die in sin. *You shall die in your sins.*—(Jo. viii., 21, 24). He has declared that they who shall seek Him at death, shall not find Him. *You shall seek me, and shall not find me.*—(Jo. vii., 34). We must, therefore, seek God while He may be found. *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found.*—(Is. lv., 6). A time shall come when it will not be in your power to find Him. Poor blind sinners! They put off their conversion till death, when there will be no more time for repentance. "The wicked," says Oleaster, "never learn to do good, except when the time for doing good is no more." God wills the salvation of all, but He takes vengeance on obstinate sinners.

Should any man in the state of sin be seized with apoplexy and be deprived of his senses, what sentiments of compassion would be excited in all who should see him die without the Sacraments and without signs of repentance! And how great would be their delight did he recover his senses, ask for absolution, and make acts of sorrow for his sins! But is not he a fool who has time to repent and prefers to continue in sin? Or who returns to sin and exposes himself to the danger of being cut off by death without the Sacraments and without repentance? A sudden death excites terror in all; and still how many expose themselves to the danger of dying suddenly, and of dying in sin. *Weight and balance are the judgments of the Lord.*—(Prov. xvi., 11). We keep no account of the graces which God bestows upon us; but He keeps an account of them. He measures them, and when He sees them despised to a certain degree, He

then abandons the sinner to his sin, and takes him out of life in that unhappy state. Miserable the man who defers his conversion till death! "The repentance which is sought," says St. Augustine, "from an infirm man is infirm." St. Jerome teaches, that of a hundred thousand sinners who continue in sin till death, scarcely one shall be saved. St. Vincent Ferrer writes that it is a greater miracle to bring such sinners to salvation than to raise the dead to life.

Ah, my God, who would have borne with me so patiently as Thou hast? If Thy goodness were not infinite, I should despair of pardon. But I have to deal with a God Who has died for my salvation. Thou didst command me to hope, and I will hope. If my sins terrify and condemn me, Thy merits and Thy promises encourage me. Thou hast promised the life of Thy grace to all who return to Thee. *Return ye and live.*—(Ezech. xviii., 32). Thou hast promised to embrace him who is converted to Thee. *Turn ye to me and I will turn to you.*—(Zach. i., 3). Thou hast said that Thou knowest not how to despise a humble and contrite heart.

II.

What sorrow for sin, what repentance can be expected at death from the man who has till that moment loved sin? Bellarmine relates that when he exhorted to contrition a certain dying person he was assisting, the dying man said that he did not know what was meant by contrition. The holy man endeavoured to explain it to him; but he said: "Father, I do not understand you; these things are too high for me." He died in that state, leaving, as the venerable Cardinal has written, "sufficiently evident signs of his damnation." St. Augustine says, that by a just chastisement, the sinner who has forgotten God during life, shall forget himself at death.

Be not deceived, says the Apostle, *God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall he reap corruption.*—(Gal. vi., 7). It would be a mockery of God to live in contempt of His laws, and afterwards to

reap remuneration and eternal glory. But, *God is not mocked!* What we sow in this life we reap in the next. For him who sows the forbidden pleasures of the flesh, nothing remains but corruption, misery, and eternal death.

Beloved Christian, what is said for others is also applicable to you. Tell me: if you were at the point of death, given over by the physicians, deprived of your senses, and in your last agony, with what fervour would you ask of God another month or week, to settle the affairs of your conscience! God gives you this time now. Thank Him for it, and apply an immediate remedy to the evil you have done. Adopt all the means of finding yourself in the grace of God when death shall come; for then there shall be no more time to acquire His friendship.

Behold, O Lord, I return to Thee and acknowledge that I deserve a thousand hells! I am sorry for having offended Thee. I firmly promise never again to offend Thee voluntarily, and to love Thee forever. Ah, do not suffer me to be ungrateful any longer for such goodness. O Eternal Father, through the merits of the obedience of Jesus Christ, Who died to obey Thee, grant that I may till death be obedient to all Thy will. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good, and through the love which I bear Thee, I desire to obey Thee. Give me holy perseverance, give me Thy love, I ask for nothing more. Mary, my Mother, intercede for me.

Spiritual Reading.

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH.

9.—ST. IGNATIUS, BISHOP OF ANTIOCH. (February 1).

St. Ignatius, also called Theophorus, that is, *one who carries God*, lived in the First Century of the Church. He was a disciple of the Apostles, particularly of St. John; by them he was baptized, and subsequently

ordained Bishop of the Church of Antioch which had the honour of having been founded by the Apostle St. Peter, and being the place where the disciples of Jesus Christ were first called *Christians*.

St. Ignatius undertook the government of this church after the death of Evodius, the successor of St. Peter, which occurred in the year of the Lord 69. Cardinal Orsi cites the opinion of some who would have it that St. Ignatius was the immediate successor of St. Peter. Our Saint governed his flock with such zeal that all the churches of Syria consulted him as an oracle. In the persecution of Domitian he had to suffer much, and laboured, at the risk of his life, for the preservation of the Faith, animating his flock to be faithful unto death. He longed for the glory of Martyrdom, frequently saying that he could not be persuaded of his love for Christ till he had testified it with his blood.

Upon the death of Domitian in the year 96, the tempest abated under Nerva, his successor. But during this time heretics did not cease to trouble the Church. This is the reason why the Saint, writing to the faithful of Smyrna, recommended them not to have any communication with heretics : " Be satisfied," he said, " with merely praying to God for those who abstain from the Eucharist, because they deny it to be the flesh of Jesus Christ Who died for our sins."

In the year 105 the persecution was renewed by the Emperor Trajan. This prince, after his conquest of the Scythians and the Dacians, published an edict which obliged all, under pain of death, to offer sacrifice to the gods. Marching afterwards against the Parthians, he arrived at Antioch ; and, hearing with how much zeal and success St. Ignatius propagated the Christian Religion, he called him to his presence and thus addressed him : " Art thou that wicked demon called Theophorus, who takest pleasure in violating our edict of sacrificing to the gods, and dost continue to seduce the inhabitants of this city by preaching the law of Christ?" Ignatius replied : " Yes, prince, I am called Theophorus ; by no one can Theophorus be called a demon, because the devils fly from the servants of God. If thou callest me a devil

because I endeavour to defeat the machinations of the devil, I well deserve the name." Trajan asked him the signification of the term *Theophorus;* the Saint replied, "It signifies *the bearer of God*." The emperor replied: "Thou carriest God in thy heart; and we, have we not also in ourselves the gods that assist us?" The Saint answered with enthusiasm: "It is an error, O prince, to give the name of gods to the demons you adore: there is only one true God, the creator of Heaven and earth, and Jesus Christ, His Only-Begotten Son." The emperor replied: "Dost thou speak of Him Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate?" "Yes," answered the Saint, "of Him I speak Who has confounded the malice of the devils, and placed them beneath the feet of those Christians who carry God in their hearts." He added that Trajan would be more happy, and his empire more prosperous, if he would believe in the Lord Jesus; but the emperor, heedless of these exhortations, offered to make him a priest of Jupiter and a member of the senate if he would sacrifice to the gods. The Saint replied that he was content to be a priest of Jesus Christ, for Whom he ardently desired to shed his blood. Trajan, filled with anger, then pronounced sentence upon the Saint—that he should be conducted in chains to Rome, and devoured by wild beasts at the public games.

St. Ignatius, having heard the sentence, raised his eyes to Heaven, and exclaimed: "I thank Thee, O Lord, because Thou hast vouchsafed to make me worthy of giving Thee a proof of my love by sacrificing my life for Thy Faith. I desire, O Lord, that the beasts may hasten to devour me, that I may make Thee the sacrifice of myself." He then stretched forth his hands to be chained, kissing the manacles as they bound him; and with tears recommending his church to God, he was conducted by the soldiers to Seleucia, and thence to Smyrna, accompanied by two of his deacons, Philo and Agathopodus, who are believed to be the authors of his Acts. Wherever the Saint passed, he ceased not his exhortations to the Faithful to persevere in Faith and Prayer, to be enamoured of the riches of Heaven, and to despise those of this earth. The Christians came, in great num-

bers, to meet him and to receive his blessing, especially the bishops and priests of the churches of Asia, who, as they perceived him going joyfully to Martyrdom, wept in the tenderness of affection. Having arrived at Smyrna, he embraced St. Polycarp, and they mutually consoled each other. He thence wrote to the churches of Ephesus, Magnesia, and Trallia. Amongst other things, he says to the Ephesians : "I carry my chains for Christ, which are to me spiritual pearls, more prized than all the treasures of the world."

Knowing that from Smyrna some Ephesians had to go to Rome by a route shorter than his, he conveyed by them his celebrated letter to the Romans; the letter is long, but a few passages are particularly worthy of being transcribed. They are as follows :

" Suffer me to be the food of wild beasts, whereby I may attain unto God. I am the wheat of God, and am to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, in order that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. . . . I earnestly desire the wild beasts that are prepared for me, which I heartily wish may soon dispatch me. I will entice them to devour me entirely and suddenly, that they may not spare me as they have others whom they feared to touch; but, if they are unwilling to meddle with me, I will even compel them to it. Pardon me, my children, I know what is good for me; I now commence to be a disciple of Christ, since I have no desire for anything visible or invisible, so that I may attain to Jesus Christ. Let fire or the cross, or the concourse of wild beasts—let cutting or tearing of the flesh—let breaking of bones and cutting of limbs—let the shattering in pieces of my entire body, and all the torments invented by the devil, come upon me that so I may attain unto Jesus Christ. . . . It is better for me to die for the sake of Jesus Christ, than to rule to the ends of the earth. . . . Pardon me, brethren; be not a hindrance in my attaining to life, for Jesus Christ is the Life of the faithful. Whilst I desire to belong to God, do not ye give me back to the world. . . . Permit me to imitate the Passion of Christ my God; let none of you who are present attempt to succour me. Be rather on my side, that is, on God's. Entertain no

desire of the world; having Jesus Christ in your mouths, let no envy find place in your breasts. Even were I myself to entreat you, when present, do not obey me, but rather believe what I now signify to you by letter. . . . My love is crucified! . . . I take no pleasure in the food of corruption, nor in the enjoyment of this life. I desire the Bread of God, which is the Flesh of Jesus Christ, and for drink, His Blood. . . . Pray for me, that I may possess God. If I consummate my sacrifice this will be a sign that you have given your consent and that you truly love me."

He next arrived at Troas, whence he wrote Epistles to the churches of Philadelphia and Smyrna, and to his friend, St. Polycarp. The soldiers fearing that they would arrive too late at Rome, for the public games were nearly at an end, hastened their march, to the great satisfaction of the holy Martyr who ardently desired to be at the place of execution. When he was near Rome, the Christians came in great numbers to meet and salute him. They thought, as Fleury relates, to induce the people to solicit his pardon, but the Saint repeated what he had stated in his letters, and prevented all interference. On entering Rome, he knelt down with the other Christians to offer himself to God, and fervently prayed that peace might be restored to the Church. He was then conducted to the Amphitheatre, where immense numbers were assembled; and, hearing the bellowings of the wild beasts, he repeated the memorable words of his Epistle to the Romans: "I am the wheat of God, and am to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, in order that I may be found the pure bread of Christ." The Saint was instantly devoured by lions, as he had desired to be, and at the moment of his death he was heard to invoke the adorable Name of Jesus.

Only the larger bones of his body were left; these were collected and brought to Antioch by his two deacons, to whom he appeared on the following night, resplendent with glory. His Martyrdom took place on the 20th December in the year 107. After the destruction of Antioch by the Saracens, his relics were removed to

Rome, and placed in the Church of St. Clement where at the present day they are venerated with great devotion. His name has been inserted in the Canon of the Mass.

Evening Meditation.

PASSING INTO ETERNITY.

I.

It is of Faith that my soul is immortal, and that one day, when I least expect it, I must leave this world. I ought therefore to make provision for myself which will not fail with this life, but will be eternal even as I am eternal. Great things were done here in their lifetime by an Alexander or a Cæsar; but for how many ages past have their glories ceased! And where are they now?

O my God, that I had always loved Thee! What now remains to me, after so many years spent in sin, but trouble and remorse of conscience? But since Thou dost allow me time to repair the evil I have done, behold me, Lord, ready to perform whatever Thou requirest of me, whatever Thou pleasest. I will spend the remainder of my days in bewailing my ungrateful conduct towards Thee, and in loving Thee with all my power, my God and my All and my only Good.

What will it avail me to have been happy in this world (if indeed true happiness can be attained without God), if hereafter I should be miserable for all eternity? But what folly it is, to know that I must die, and that an eternity either of happiness or misery awaits me after death, and that upon dying ill or well depends my being miserable or happy forever, and yet, not to adopt every means in my power to secure a good death!

Holy Spirit, enlighten and strengthen me to live always in Thy grace, until the hour of my departure. O infinite Goodness, I am sensible of the evil which I have done in offending Thee, and I detest it: I know that Thou alone art worthy of being loved, and I love Thee above all things.

II.

In a word, all the good things of this life must end at our burial and be left behind, while we are mouldering in our graves. The shadow of death will cover and obscure all the grandeur and splendour of this world. Only he, then, can be called happy who serves God in this world, and by loving and serving Him acquires eternal happiness.

O Jesus, I am truly sorry for having hitherto made so little account of Thy love. Now I love Thee above all things, and I desire nothing else but to love Thee. Henceforth Thou only shalt be the sole object of my love; Thou only shalt be my All; and this is the only inheritance I ask of Thee,—to love Thee always, both in this life and in the next. By the merits of Thy bitter Passion, give me perseverance in all virtues. Mary, Mother of God, thou art my hope.

Tuesday—Fifth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

IN DEATH THE SINNER SHALL SEEK FOR PEACE AND THERE SHALL BE NONE.

What peace can the sinner enjoy when he sees that he must in a few moments appear before the Judgment seat of Jesus Christ Whose laws and friendship he has till then despised? *When distress shall come upon them, they shall seek for peace and there shall be none. Trouble shall come upon trouble.*—(Ezech. vii., 25). O Wounds of Jesus, you are my hope!

I.

At present sinners banish the remembrance and thought of death, and thus expect to find peace though they shall never find it in the sinful life they lead. But when they are in the straits of death and on the point of entering into eternity, *they shall seek peace and there shall be none*. Then they will not be able to fly from the torture of their sinful conscience. They will seek peace, but what peace can be found by a soul loaded with sins which sting her like so many vipers? What peace can the sinner enjoy when he sees that he must in a few moments appear before the Judgment-seat of Jesus Christ, Whose law and friendship he has till then despised? *Trouble shall come upon trouble*. The news that he must now die, which has been already announced, the thought of being obliged to take leave of everything in this world, the remorse of conscience, the time lost, the want of time now, the rigour of the Divine Judgment, the unhappy eternity which awaits sinners—all these things will form a horrible tempest which will confuse the mind and increase diffidence: and thus, full of confusion and distrust, the dying sinner will pass to the other world.

Trusting in the Divine promise, Abraham, with great merit, hoped in God against human hope. But sinners, with great guilt, hope foolishly and to their own ruin, because they hope not only against hope, but also contrary to the teachings of their Faith, for they despise the menaces of God against all who are obstinate in sin. They are afraid of a bad death, but they fear not to lead a wicked life.

O Wounds of Jesus, you are my hope. I should despair of the pardon of my sins, and of my eternal salvation, did I not behold you, the Fountains of mercy and grace, through which a God has shed all His Blood, to wash my soul from the sins I have committed. I adore you, then, O holy Wounds, and trust in you. I detest a thousand times, and curse those vile pleasures by which I have displeased my Redeemer, and have miserably lost His friendship. Looking, then, at you, I raise up my hopes, and turn my affections to you, O Wounds of Jesus.

II.

But who has assured them that they will not suddenly be deprived of life by a thunderbolt, by apoplexy, or by the bursting of a blood-vessel? And were they at death even allowed time for repentance, who assures them that they will sincerely return to God? To conquer bad habits, St. Augustine had to fight against them for twelve years. How will the dying man who has always lived in sin, be able in the midst of the pains, the stupefaction and the confusion of death, to repent sincerely of all his past iniquities? I say *sincerely*, because it is not enough to say and to promise with the tongue: it is necessary to promise with the heart. O God, what terror and confusion will seize the unhappy Christian who has led a careless life, when he finds himself overwhelmed with sins, with the fears of the Judgment, of Hell, and of Eternity! Oh what confusion will not these thoughts produce when the dying sinner will find his reason going, his mind darkened, and his whole frame assailed by the pains of approaching death. He will make his confession, he will promise, weep, and seek mercy from God, but without understanding what he does; and in this tempest of agitation, of remorse, of pains and terrors, he will pass to the other life. *The people shall be troubled, and they shall pass.*—(Job xxxiv., 20). A certain author says that the prayers, the wailings, and promises of dying sinners are like the tears and promises of a man assailed by an enemy who points a dagger at his throat to take away his life. Miserable the man who, at enmity with God, takes to his bed and passes from the bed of sickness into Eternity!

My dear Jesus, Thou deservest to be loved by all men, and to be loved with their whole heart. I have grievously offended Thee, for I have despised Thy love; but notwithstanding my sinfulness, Thou hast borne with me so long, and with so much mercy invited me to pardon. Ah, my Saviour, do not permit me to offend Thee any more and merit my own damnation. O God, what torture should I feel in hell at the sight of Thy Blood and of the great mercies Thou hast shown me! I love Thee and

will always love Thee. Give me holy perseverance. Detach my heart from all love which is not for Thee, and confirm in me a true desire, a true resolution henceforth, to love only Thee, my sovereign Good. O Mary, my Mother, draw me to God, and obtain for me the grace to belong entirely to Him before I die.

Spiritual Reading.

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH.

10.—ST. PIONIUS, PRIEST. (February 1).

St. Pionius was a priest of the church of Smyrna, and an exceedingly learned man. He was filled with the love of Jesus Christ, and had great zeal for the conversion of souls, which was successfully exercised in the conversion of many infidels and abandoned sinners.

In his time, that is, about the year 250, the persecution of Decius was raging, and the Saint by continual prayer prepared himself for Martyrdom. One day as he was engaged in prayer with Asclepiades and Sabina, two pious Christians, it was revealed to them that on the day following they would be arrested for the Faith. They therefore made an offering of their lives to Jesus Christ, and placed halters about their necks in order to signify to the soldiers that they were ready for Martyrdom.

On the following morning, Palemon, the guardian of the temple, came with a troop of soldiers, and said to them: "Are ye aware of the orders of the emperor, that you are all to sacrifice to the gods of the empire?" Pionius answered: "That of which we are aware is the order of God,—not to sacrifice to any but Himself, the Sovereign Lord of all." Upon this reply they were all arrested and led into a great square, where St. Pionius, turning to the enemies of the Faith, said that they were vainly rejoicing on account of the apostasy of some few

bad Christians, and protested that no species of torture would ever compel him to adore those whom they impiously called "gods."

Palemon said to him: "And why wilt thou, Pionius, regardless of life, deprive thyself of the beautiful light of the day which thou enjoyest?" The Saint replied: "This light is, indeed, beauteous, but there is another light more glorious, and a life more estimable, to which Christians aspire." The people called upon him to sacrifice, but he answered: "Our resolve is to persevere in the Faith."

The people desired that the Saint should speak in the theatre in order that they might all hear him conveniently, but some told Palemon that if he gave him liberty to speak, a tumult might follow. He therefore said to Pionius: "If thou wilt not sacrifice, come with us at least to the temple." The Saint said: "Our entrance into your temple cannot benefit your gods." "Then," said Palemon, "thou wilt not be persuaded?" Pionius replied: "Would to God I could persuade you all to become Christians!" Some of the idolaters exclaimed: "Thou canst never induce us to do that. We would rather be burned alive." The Saint rejoined: "But it will be worse for you to burn eternally after death."

Palemon who was anxious to save the life of Pionius, ceased not to importune him; but the Saint resolutely answered: "Thou hast orders to persuade or to punish me; thou canst not persuade, therefore punish." Hereupon Palemon, being enraged, asked: "But why wilt thou not sacrifice?" Pionius: "Because I am a Christian." Palemon: "Who is the God Whom thou adorest?" Pionius: "I adore the Almighty God, Who, having made all things, created us also, as I have learned from Jesus Christ." Palemon: "Sacrifice to the emperor at least." Pionius: "I shall never sacrifice to a man."

The judge then judicially inquired his name, and to what church he belonged. The Saint replied: "I am a Christian, and belong to the Catholic Church." His companions gave the same answer, and they were all

sent to prison. On the road thither some of the idolaters observed that many Christians had sacrificed. The Saint answered: "Each one is master of his own will: my name is Pionius." By this he meant to encourage the others to imitate his example, and remain constant to the Faith.

When they came to the prison, many pious Christians offered them refreshments, but Pionius said: "I have not time to think of anything but the Martyrdom that awaits me." The guards, seeing so many Christians coming to visit the Saint, brought him and his companions to a more remote and obscure place, for which they gave thanks to God, as their more solitary confinement enabled them to commune more freely with God. Notwithstanding the change, however, many Christians, who had abandoned the Faith on account of the violence of the torments, came to Pionius, who wept over their fall and exhorted them to do penance, and hope for pardon, through the mercy of Jesus Christ.

Palemon then arrived with a troop of soldiers, and orders from the proconsul to take the Confessors to Ephesus. The Saint desired to see the order, but the commanding officer put a halter round his neck, and dragged him so violently as almost to suffocate him. He was thus led to the square; and when the Martyrs arrived at the temple, they cast themselves on the ground in order not to enter, but the soldiers dragged them in, and placed them erect before the impious altar. They there met Eudæmon, the unhappy Bishop of Smyrna, who had miserably sacrificed to the gods, and the idolaters vainly hoped that they might be moved by his example to prevaricate also. One of the idolaters wished to place on the head of St. Pionius a crown which had been worn by one of the apostates, but the Saint broke it in pieces, and cast it from him. Not knowing what to do to pervert the Confessors, they brought them back to prison, and while Pionius was entering, one of the soldiers smote him on the head. The Saint bore it with patience, but God chastised his assailant by causing not only his hand, but his side to become swollen and inflamed, so that he could not breathe.

After some days the proconsul arrived at Smyrna, and having summoned Pionius, asked him to what sect he belonged. The Saint replied : " I am a priest of the Catholic Church." The proconsul rejoined : " Then art thou a doctor and a professor of folly?" Pionius : " No, but of piety." Proconsul : " And of what piety?" Pionius : " Of that piety which has for its object the God Who made heaven and earth." The proconsul then commanded him to sacrifice, but the Saint replied : " I have learned to adore One only living God." The tyrant then ordered him to be tortured, during which having in vain importuned him to sacrifice, he finally condemned him to be burned.

In proceeding to the place of execution, St. Pionius walked quickly and with joyous countenance. Having arrived at the place, he undressed without assistance, and offered himself to be nailed to the stake, after which the pagans exclaimed : " Repent, O Pionius ! Promise to obey and thou shalt be saved." But he replied : " I have not felt the pain of the nails. I desire to die that the people may know that death shall be followed by resurrection." The pile having been fired, the Saint closed his eyes, so that the spectators thought he was already dead, but he was only praying. He opened his eyes, and having concluded the prayer with the usual " Amen," placidly gave up the ghost, saying : " Lord Jesus, receive my soul."

The end of his companions is not upon record, but it is piously believed that they also received the crown of Martyrdom.

Evening Meditation.

THE REFORMATION OF OUR LIVES.

I.

Every one desires to die the death of the Saints ; but it is scarcely possible for the Christian to make a holy end who has led a disorderly life until the time of his death, and to die united to God, after having always lived at a

distance from Him. The Saints in order to secure a happy death, renounced all the riches, the delights, and all the prospects this world held out to them, and embraced poor and mortified lives. They buried themselves alive in this world to avoid, when dead, being buried for ever in hell. O God, for how many years past have I deserved to be buried in that place of torments, without hope of pardon or of being able to love Thee. But Thou hast waited in order to pardon me. Truly, then, I am sorry, from the bottom of my heart, for having offended Thee, my Sovereign Good. Have pity on me and do not permit me to offend Thee any more.

God forewarns sinners that they will seek Him in death and will not find Him : *You shall seek and shall not find me.*—(Jo. vii., 34). They will not find Him because they will not then seek Him through love, but only through the fear of hell. They will seek God without renouncing their affection for sin ; and hence they shall not find Him. No, my God, I will not wait to seek Thee in death, but will seek and desire Thee from this moment. I am sorry for having hitherto given Thee so much displeasure by seeking to gratify my own inclinations. I am sorry for it. I confess that I have done evil. But Thou willest not that the heart which seeks Thee should despair but rejoice. *Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord.*—(Ps. civ., 3). Yes, O Lord, I seek Thee and I love Thee more than myself.

II.

How miserable is the Christian who, before he comes to die, has not spent a good part of his life in bewailing his sins ! It is not to be denied that such a man may be converted at his death and obtain salvation ; but the mind obscured, the heart hardened, the bad habits formed, the passions predominant, render it morally impossible for him to die happily. An extraordinary grace will be necessary for him ; but does God reserve such a grace to bestow it upon one who has continued ungrateful to Him even until the moment of death ? O God, to what straits are sinners reduced to escape

eternal destruction! No, my God, I will not wait until death to repent of my sins and to love Thee. I am sorry now for having offended Thee, and I love Thee now with my whole heart. Suffer me not any more to turn my back upon Thee. Rather let me die. O holy Mary, obtain for me perseverance in virtue.

Wednesday—Fifth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

TARDY REGRETS OF A DYING MAN.

O fool that I have been!—the poor sick man will say,—with the lights and opportunities that God gave me I could have become a Saint! And now I shall scarcely save my soul! The sick man will wish for time, but the assisting Priest will say: Go forth! Do you not know that death will wait for no one?

I.

The dying man who has neglected the salvation of his soul, will find thorns in everything that is presented to him—thorns in the remembrance of his past amusements, rivalries overcome, and the former display of pomp; thorns in the friends who will visit him, and in whatever their presence shall bring before his mind; thorns in the confessors who may in turn assist him; thorns in the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist, and Extreme Unction, which he must receive; thorns even in the Crucifix placed before him. In that Sacred Image he will read his want of correspondence to the love of a God Who died for his salvation.

O fool that I have been! the poor sick man will say, with the lights and opportunities that God gave me, I could have become a Saint! I could have led a life of happiness in the grace of God, and after the many years He gave me, what do I find but torment, distrust, fears, remorse of conscience, and an account to render to God!

I shall now scarcely save my soul! And when will he say this? When the oil in the lamp is just being consumed, and the scene of this world is about to close forever; when he finds himself face to face with two eternities, one happy, the other miserable; when he is near that last gasp on which depends his everlasting bliss or eternal despair. What would he then give for another year, month, or even another week, with the perfect use of his faculties? In the stupefaction, oppression of the chest, and difficulty of breathing under which he labours, he can do nothing; he is incapable of reflection, or of applying his mind to the performance of any good act: he is, as it were, shut up in a dark pit of confusion, where he can see nothing but the ruin that threatens him, and which he feels himself unable to avert. He would wish for time; but the assisting priest shall say to him, *Proficiscere!*—Go forth! Adjust your accounts as well as you can in the few moments that remain, and depart. Do you not know that death waits for no one, respects no one?

Ah, my God, Thou willest not my death, but that I be converted and live. I thank Thee for having waited for me till now, and I thank Thee for the light which Thou givest me at this moment. I know the error I have committed in preferring to Thy friendship the vile and miserable goods for which I have despised Thee. I repent, and am sorry with my whole heart for having done Thee so great an injury.

II.

Oh! with what dismay will he then say to himself: This morning I am alive; this evening I shall probably be dead! To-day I am in this room; to-morrow I shall be in the grave! And where will my soul be found? With what terror will he be seized when he sees the death candle prepared! When he hears his relatives ordered to withdraw from his apartment, and to return to it no more! When his sight begins to grow dim! Finally, how great will be his alarm and confusion when he sees that death is at hand and the candle is lighted! O candle, how many truths will you then disclose to view!

How different will you make things appear then from what they appear at present! O how clearly will you show the dying sinner that all the goods of this world are vanities, folly, and lies! But of what use is it to understand these truths when the time is past for profiting by them?

Ah, my God, cease not during the remainder of my life to assist me by Thy light and Thy grace to know and to do all that I ought to do in order to amend my life. What will it profit me to know these truths when I shall be deprived of the time in which they may be reduced to practice? *Deliver not up to beasts the souls that confess to thee.*—(Ps. lxxiii., 19). When the devil tempts me to offend Thee again, ah! I entreat Thee, my Jesus, through the merits of Thy Passion to stretch forth Thy hand and to preserve me from falling into sin, and becoming again the slave of my enemies. Grant that in all temptations I may have recourse to Thee, and that I may not cease to recommend myself to Thee as long as the temptations continue. Thy Blood is my hope, and Thy goodness my love. I love Thee, my God, worthy of infinite love. Grant that I may always love Thee. Make known to me the things from which I ought to detach my heart, that I may be entirely Thine: I wish to detach my heart from them: but give me strength to execute this desire. O Queen of Heaven! O Mother of God, pray for me, a sinner. Obtain for me the grace that in all temptations I may never omit to have recourse to Jesus and to thee, who, by thy intercession, dost preserve from sin all who invoke thee.

Spiritual Reading.

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH.

11.—ST. BLASE, BISHOP OF SEBASTE.

(February 3).

St. Blase was a native of the city of Sebaste, in Armenia, and in his younger days applied himself to the study of Philosophy in which he made considerable pro-

gress; he afterwards studied Medicine with great success. The Science of the Saints, however, and a desire to grow in the love of God, chiefly occupied his attention, whereby being inflamed with ardent charity towards the poor, he visited them frequently and relieved them in their sickness. Upon the death of the bishop, his fellow-citizens unanimously elected him as their pastor, by reason of his extraordinary virtues and great learning.

He accepted the office, as being unwilling to resist the will of God which appeared too manifest in his election to be doubted; but in the government of his church he lost not that spirit of holy retirement which he had had from his youth. He therefore retired to Mount Argeus, without the city, and dwelt in a cave there. During our Saint's residence in this place the Lord was pleased to manifest his sanctity by honouring him with the gift of miracles, and numerous crowds of persons used constantly to come to him for the cure of their bodily diseases as well as of their spiritual maladies. Even the most ferocious animals are said to have proceeded to his cave to be relieved. If they found the Saint in prayer, they would patiently wait until he had done; nor would they depart until they had received his blessing.*

About the year 315, Agricolaus, governor of Cappadocia and Lesser Armenia, had been sent by the Emperor Licinius to Sebaste to put to death the Christians of that

* Four different manuscript Acts of this Saint have been published by the Bollandists, who observe that the first is of very great antiquity. These four MSS. agree in the leading facts, and all mention the circumstance of the beasts visiting our Saint and being blessed by him. The MS. III compares St. Blase, in this respect to Daniel in the den of lions, and to Elias in the wilderness, and MS. IV., which was in the possession of Cardinal Baronius, observes that, as the Prophet was fed by ravens, so our Saint was supplied with food by the wild beasts that frequented his cave. As it was the sin of man that first rendered animals savage towards man, it has been regarded as a proof of the innocence and sanctity of a person to find wild beasts inoffensive and familiar with him; and several instances of this mark of holiness are to be met with in the *Lives of the Saints*. The blessing of those beasts by St. Blase will remind some readers of the ceremony still performed at Rome, on St. Anthony's Day (17th January), when horses and other useful animals are assembled before the church and blessed. In the beginning, Almighty Creator Himself blessed all His creatures, but after the fall of man, pronounced a curse upon the earth. It is to avert as much as possible the effects of this malediction that we pray for the giving and preserving of the fruits of the earth, and for the well being of those animals that God has created for our benefit, and for the manifestation of His own Almighty power. Some non-Catholics are found who, with scrupulous punctuality, say *grace* before meat, and implore the blessing of Heaven on the roasted ribs of an ox upon their table, and yet so far forget themselves as to ridicule the blessing pronounced over the *living* animal on St. Anthony's Day in Rome,—ED.

city. Immediately upon his arrival he commenced to put his bloody commission into execution, by commanding that all those who had been already imprisoned for the Faith should be devoured by wild beasts. He accordingly sent huntsmen into the neighbouring forest to catch the ferocious animals, in order to execute his barbarous design. When they arrived at Mount Argeus, they found a multitude of these beasts assembled round the cave of St. Blase, and the holy bishop in the midst of them performing his devotions. Astonished at this sight, they returned to Agricolaus, and informed him of the fact, which, although it caused him to marvel greatly, did not prevent him from sending his soldiers to arrest our Saint. When they intimated to him the order of the governor he answered with a cheerful countenance : " Let us go to shed our blood for Jesus Christ !" Then turning to those who stood by, he protested that he had long sighed for the honour of Martyrdom, and that on the preceding night the Lord had manifested to him that He would vouchsafe to accept the sacrifice of his life.

As soon as the news was spread among the citizens that their bishop was being led to Sebaste by order of the governor, the streets were filled with people who, with tears in their eyes, asked his blessing. Among them was a woman, who, weeping bitterly, presented to him her child, who was expiring by reason of a small bone having stuck in his throat. Full of holy confidence, she besought the Saint to save the child's life. St. Blase moved to compassion by the tears of the afflicted mother, prayed to the Lord not only for the relief of that child, but for all those who should find themselves similarly afflicted. Having terminated his prayer the child recovered; and hence the origin of the special devotion of the faithful to this Saint when afflicted with diseases of the throat.

When St. Blase arrived at the city and was presented to the governor, he was commanded to sacrifice to the " immortal gods." The Saint answered : " What a title for your demons who can bring only evil on their worshippers ! There is only One Immortal God and Him do I adore." Agricolaus, infuriated at this answer,

caused the Saint to undergo a scourging so prolonged and cruel that it was thought the Saint could not possibly survive it; but having endured the torture with placid courage, he was sent to prison where he continued to work miracles so extraordinary that the governor ordered him to be again lacerated with iron hooks.

The blood of the Saint ran profusely, and certain pious women were induced to collect portions of it, which act of devotion was amply rewarded, for they were seized, with two of their children and brought before the governor. He commanded them to sacrifice to the gods under pain of death. The holy women asked for their idols, as some thought, to sacrifice to them, but they no sooner laid hands upon them than they cast them into an adjoining lake, for which they and their children were instantly beheaded.

Agricolaus resolved to wreak his vengeance on St. Blase; and therefore not content with the torture he had already caused him to endure, commanded him to be stretched upon the rack, and his flesh to be torn with iron combs, in which state a red-hot coat of mail was placed upon him. Finally, the tyrant, despairing of overcoming his constancy, ordered him to be cast into the lake. The Saint, arming himself with the Sign of the Cross, walked upon the waters, and, arriving at the middle, sat down, and invited the idolaters to do the same if they believed that their gods could enable them. Some were so rash as to make the attempt, but were immediately drowned.

St. Blase was admonished then by a voice from Heaven to go forth from the lake and encounter his Martyrdom. When he reached the land the impious tyrant ordered him to be beheaded. This sentence was executed in the year 313. The Republic of Ragusa honours him as their Principal Patron, and he is the Titular Saint of many cities.

Evening Meditation.

THE MERCIFUL CHASTISEMENTS OF GOD.

I.

God is infinite Goodness and desires only our good and to communicate to us His own happiness. When He chastises us, it is because we have obliged Him to do so by our sins. Hence the Prophet Isaias says that on such occasions He doth a work *that is strange to him.* —(Is. xxviii., 21). Hence it is said that it is the property of God to have mercy and to spare, to dispense His favours and to make all happy.

O God, it is this Thy infinite Goodness which sinners offend and despise when they provoke Thee to chastise them! Wretch that I am, how often have I offended Thy infinite Goodness!

Let us therefore understand that when God threatens us it is not because He desires to punish us, but because He wishes to deliver us from punishment; He threatens because He would have compassion on us. *O God, . . . thou hast been angry, and hast had mercy on us.*—(Ps. lix., 3). But how is this? He is angry with us and yet treats us with mercy? Yes! He shows Himself angry towards us in order that we may amend our lives, and that thus He may be able to pardon and save us. Hence, if in this life He chastises us for our sins, He does so in His mercy, for by so doing He frees us from eternal chastisements. How unfortunate, then, is the sinner who escapes punishment in this life!

Since, then, O my God, I have so much offended Thee, chastise me in this life, that Thou mayest spare me in the next. I know that I have certainly deserved hell; I accept all kinds of pain, that Thou mayest reinstate me in Thy grace and deliver me from hell where I should be forever separated from Thee. Enlighten and strengthen me to overcome every obstacle to Thy friendship.

II.

He that makes no account of the Divine threats ought to fear much lest the chastisement threatened in Scripture should suddenly overtake him. *The man that with a stiff neck despiseth him that reproveth him, shall suddenly be destroyed, and health shall not follow him.* —(Prov. xxix., 1). A sudden death shall overtake him that despises God's reprehensions, and he shall have no time to avoid eternal destruction.

This, O Jesus, has happened to so many, and I, indeed, have deserved that the like should happen to me; but, O my Redeemer, Thou hast shown mercy towards me that Thou hast not shown to many others who have offended Thee less frequently than I have, and who are now suffering in hell with not the least hope of ever again being able to regain Thy favour. I know, O Lord, that Thou desirest my salvation, and I also desire it that I may please Thee. I renounce all and turn myself to Thee, Who art my God and my only Good. I believe in Thee, I hope in Thee, I love Thee, and Thee alone. O infinite Goodness, I am exceedingly displeased with myself for having hitherto done evil against Thee; and I wish that I had suffered every evil rather than offended Thee. Suffer me not any more to depart from Thee; rather let me die than offer Thee so great an injury. In Thee, my crucified Jesus, do I place all my hopes. O Mary, Mother of Jesus, recommend me to thy Son.

Thursday—Fifth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

CONFIDENCE IN JESUS CHRIST.

The Divine Mercy is like a vast fountain from which he who has brought the largest vessel of confidence carries away the richest abundance of graces. This is according to what the Psalmist says : *Let thy mercy be upon us, O Lord, according as we have put our trust in thee.*—(Ps. xxxii., 22). Let us go with confidence, then, to the feet of Jesus Christ, and there we shall find mercy and pardon.

I.

Wonderfully great is the mercy of Jesus Christ to us; but for our greater good He desires that we should put our trust in His mercy with a lively confidence, trusting in His merits and His promises. Therefore St. Paul recommends us to preserve this confidence, saying that it has a great reward from God.—(Heb. x., 35). When a fear, then, of the Divine Judgment seems to diminish this confidence in us, we ought to cast it away, and say to ourselves : " My heart, dost thou tremble? Knowest thou not how to hope? Banish thy fear, and tremble not. Why wilt thou trouble me? Hope in the Lord that we may one day sing His praise and His glory."

The Lord revealed to St. Gertrude that our confidence so constrains Him that He cannot possibly refuse to hear us in whatever we seek of Him. The same was said by St. John Climachus : " Prayer exerts a holy violence upon God." Every prayer offered with confidence, as it were, forces God; but this force is acceptable and pleasing to Him. Therefore, St. Bernard writes that the

Divine mercy is like a vast fountain from which he who brings a larger vessel of confidence carries away a richer abundance of graces. And this is according to what the Psalmist wrote, *Let thy mercy be upon us, O Lord, according as we have put our trust in thee.*—(Ps. xxxii., 22).

God has declared by the Royal Prophet that He *protects and saves all who trust in him.*—(Ps. xvii., 31; xvi., 7). And again: *Let all them be glad that hope in thee: they shall rejoice for ever, and thou shall dwell in them.*—(Ps. v., 12). The same Prophet said: *Mercy is round about all who trust in God.* (Ps. xxxi., 10). He that trusts in God shall ever be so guarded and encircled around that he is safe from all danger of perishing. Oh, what great promises the Holy Scriptures make to those who trust in God! Are we lost through our sins? Behold the remedy at hand! *Let us go with confidence,* says the Apostle, *to the seat of Jesus Christ, the throne of grace, and there shall we find mercy and pardon.*—(Heb. iv., 16). Let us not wait to go to Jesus Christ until He sits upon His *throne of Judgment*; let us hasten at once while He sits on His *throne of grace.*

II.

But, says the sinner, if I beg for pardon I do not deserve to be heard. I reply, though he does not deserve pardon, his confidence in the Divine mercy will obtain grace for him; for this pardon is not dependent upon his merits, but upon the Divine promise to pardon those who repent; and this is what Jesus Christ says: *Every one that asketh receiveth.*—(Luke, xi., 10). A certain author commenting on the words *every one,* says that they mean every one, whether just or unjust. It is sufficient that they pray with confidence. Let us, then, learn from the lips of Jesus Christ Himself what great things are done by confidence: *All things whatsoever ye seek when ye pray, believe that ye shall receive, and they shall come unto you.*—(Mark xi., 24).

Whosoever, then, fears that through infirmity he shall fall again into his old sins, let him trust in God, and he

shall not fall, as the Prophet assures us : *None of them that trust in him shall offend.*—(Ps. xxxiii., 23). Isaias says that *they who hope in the Lord shall renew their strength.*—(Is. xl., 31). Let us, then, be strong, not wavering in our confidence, because God has promised, as St. Paul says, to protect all who hope in Him ; and when anything seems especially difficult to overcome, then let us say, *I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.*—(Phil. iv., 13). And who that ever trusted in God was confounded ? Yet, let us not search after some constant sensible confidence, a confidence we can feel. It is enough if we have *the will to trust.* This is true confidence, *the will to trust in God,* because He is good and desires to help us, is powerful and can help us, is faithful and has promised to help us. Above all, let us strengthen ourselves with the promise made by Jesus Christ : *Amen, amen, I say to you : if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you.*—(John xvi., 23). Thus let us seek grace from God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, and we shall obtain what we wish.

O Eternal God, I know that I am poor in all things ; I can do nothing, I have nothing, save what comes to me from Thy hands ; all I can say to Thee is : O Lord, have mercy upon me ! My misery is, that to my poverty I have added the sin of having responded to Thy graces with the sins I have committed against Thee. But, notwithstanding, I would hope from Thy mercy for this twofold blessing : first, that Thou wouldst pardon my sins ; and then, that Thou wouldst give me perseverance, together with Thy holy love and grace to pray to Thee constantly for help even until death. I ask it all of Thee ; I hope for it through the merits of Thy Son Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary. O my chief advocate, help me with thy prayers.

Spiritual Reading.

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH.

12.—SS. PHILEAS, BISHOP OF THMUIS, AND PHILOROMUS, TRIBUNE.

(February 4).

Among the many Martyrs of Egypt and Thebais Saints Phileas and Philoromus attract particular attention on account of their exalted rank and the high estimation in which, according to Eusebius, they were held in their own country. They shed their blood for the Faith at Alexandria, between the years 306 and 312.

Phileas had discharged some of the highest offices of state in the city of Thmuis, in Egypt. He was a pagan by birth, was married, and had children who were still pagans when the Saint laid down his life for Christ. He was somewhat advanced in life when he was converted, but the Lord filled him with such virtue, that he deserved to be appointed bishop of his native place.* He was arrested during the persecution and was conducted to prison in Alexandria.

We have a letter written by him to his flock, while he was in prison for the Faith and about to consummate his Martyrdom, which shows his holy zeal and pastoral solicitude. He there encourages the faithful to suffer every torture for Jesus Christ rather than renounce the Faith; adducing the examples of so many saintly heroes who, having the eyes of their souls fixed on God, went joyfully to encounter death, in the full confidence that God would comfort His servants in the trial that would win for them eternal life. He then exhorts them to confide in the merits of Jesus Christ, and to keep continually before

* In the primitive times in which the Church was composed only of converts, it was not unusual to see married men raised to the dignity of the priesthood and even to that of the episcopate: but these were then obliged to live in perpetual continence. The ministers of the altar are consecrated to God, and can no longer belong to any one except to God alone.—ED.

their eyes His Passion and Death, as well as the eternal rewards Christ promises to those who will be constant in confessing Him before men.

A short time after the writing of this letter the Martyrs were brought before Culcian, the governor of Egypt, who exhorted them to have pity upon themselves, their wives and children, who, together with many relatives and friends in Alexandria, had come to dissuade them. But all their arts were incapable of shaking the constancy of the Martyrs. Phileas, standing upon the platform and being told by the governor to enter into himself and be wise, answered : " I have never lost my judgment." Culcian : " Then sacrifice to the gods." Phileas : " I sacrifice to only One God, not to many."

" Thy conscience," said the governor, " should make thee sacrifice for thy wife and children." Phileas answered : " Conscience obliges me to prefer God to all things ; since the Scripture saith that thou shalt love thy God Who created thee above all things." " Which God ?" said Culcian. The Saint stretching out his hand to Heaven, said : " That God Who created Heaven and earth, and endureth forever." Culcian asked him : " Was Christ God ?" The Saint replied : " Yes, truly, for He hath raised the dead to life, and worked many other miracles." " But how !" exclaimed the governor ; " Was a God, then, crucified ?" " Yes," replied Phileas ; " He was crucified for our salvation, for which He willingly suffered ignominy and death ; all His sufferings were foretold in the Holy Scriptures. If any be desirous of further information, let them come forward and they shall see the truth !"

The Saint then told the governor that he was anxious for him to execute his orders. " Then," said Culcian, " thou art anxious to die without reason." " Not without reason," said Phileas, " but for God and for the truth." " I would wish," said the governor, "to save thee for thy brother's sake."* But Phileas replied : " I beseech thee to execute that which hath been commanded thee." Culcian said : " If I knew thee to be poor, I

* This brother, Alban Butler says, was one of the judges.—Ed.

would not desire to save thee; but thou art possessed of great wealth, and canst support many; sacrifice, therefore and live." Phileas answered: "I will not sacrifice." Culcian: "Dost thou not see thy wife, how piteously she looks upon thee?" Phileas: "Jesus Christ Whom I serve, is our Saviour; as He has called me; He can also call her to the inheritance of His glory."

The governor here offered him time to consider; but the holy bishop said: "I have given all these points sufficient consideration and am determined to suffer for Christ." Hereupon his relatives cast themselves at his feet, and besought him to have compassion upon his wife and children: but the Saint, raising his eyes to God, declared that he should not think of any relatives other than the Saints in Heaven.

Among the persons of distinction present at this spectacle was Philoromus, a military tribune, who held a very high office in the administration of justice. Having listened to the wailings of the bishop's relatives and the exhortations of the governor, he raised his voice and exclaimed: "Why do you vainly endeavour to shake his constancy? Why do you fatigue yourselves uselessly with one whom you see faithful to his God? Do you not perceive that your entreaties and your tears are of no avail? Tears shed from human motives cannot move the soul of a Christian who has God before his eyes." The entire multitude, enraged at these words of Philoromus, cried out that he should be condemned to the same death as Phileas; whereupon the governor commanded that both should be beheaded.

As the entire crowd were proceeding with the Martyrs to the place of execution, the bishop's brother said with a loud voice that Phileas had demanded an appeal. Culcian instantly called them back; but Phileas said: "I have not demanded any appeal. Give no ear to this wretched man. I am much beholden to the judges who have made me a co-heir with Jesus Christ."

Having said this he moved forward to the place of execution, where, having arrived together with his companion, he raised his voice and spoke to the Christians: "My dear children, those of you that seek

God in truth should be careful to abstain from sin, since the enemy goeth about seeking whom he may devour. As yet we had not suffered. We now commence to suffer, and to be truly disciples of Jesus Christ. Be ye attentive to the observance of His Commandments, and continually invoke the Creator of all things, to Whom be glory forever!" At the termination of this exhortation both Martyrs were beheaded. In this manner did these two heroes consummate their sacrifice.

Evening Meditation.

THE FOLLY OF LIVING AS ENEMIES OF GOD.

I.

Sinners call the Saints fools, who, in this life, fly from honours, riches, and the pleasures of sense, and embrace poverty, contempt, and mortification. But at the day of final retribution those sinners will confess that they themselves have been fools in judging the lives of the Saints to be folly: *We fools esteemed their life madness.*—(Wis. v., 4). And what greater folly can there be than to live without God?—which is to live a miserable life in this world, to be succeeded by a still more miserable life in hell.

No, I will not wait till the Last Day to confess my folly; I now confess it. How great has my folly been in offending Thee, my sovereign Good! *Father, I am not worthy to be called thy son.*—(Luke xv., 19). Father, I am not worthy to receive Thy forgiveness, but I hope for it through the Blood which Thou hast shed for my sake. My Jesus, I am sorry for having despised Thee, I love Thee above all things.

Unhappy sinners! Blinded by their sins, they lose all judgment. What would be said of a man who should sell a kingdom for the smallest coin? And what should be said of him who, for a momentary pleasure, a vapour,

a caprice, sells Heaven and the grace of God? They think only of this life, which will shortly end; and in the meantime deserve hell for the life which will never end.

O my God, permit me not any more to become so blind as to prefer to Thee my own unlawful gratifications, and for the sake of them to despise Thee, my sovereign Good! I now detest them and love Thee above all things.

II.

Miserable worldlings! The time will come when they will bewail their folly. But when? When there shall be no longer anything to prevent their eternal ruin. Then shall they say: *What hath pride profited us, or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow.*—(Wis. v., 8, 9). Behold, they will exclaim, how all our delights have passed away like a shadow, and nothing now remains to us but suffering and eternal lamentation. Dear Jesus, have pity on me! I have forgotten Thee; but Thou hast not forgotten me. I love Thee with my whole soul, and I detest, above all evil whatsoever, the sins I have committed against Thee. Pardon me, O God and remember not my offences against Thee. And since Thou knowest my weakness, do not abandon me. Give me strength to overcome all things to please Thee. O Mary, Mother of God, in you do I place my hopes.

Friday—Fifth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE WOUNDS OF JESUS OUR HOPE.

TheWounds of Jesus Christ are now the blessed Fountains from which we can draw forth all graces. What, then, art thou afraid of, O sinner? Be not distrustful, says Jesus; see how much thou didst cost Me! I keep

thee engraven upon My hands in these Wounds. These are ever reminding Me to help thee, and to defend thee from thine enemies. Love Me and have confidence!

I.

Oh, how great is the hope of salvation which the death of Jesus Christ imparts to us! *Who is he that shall condemn? Christ Jesus who died, who also maketh intercession for us.*—(Rom. viii., 34). Who is it, asks the Apostle, that has to condemn us? It is that same Redeemer Who, in order not to condemn us to eternal death, condemned Himself to a cruel death upon a Cross. From this St. Thomas of Villanova encourages us, saying: What dost thou fear, sinner, if thou art willing to leave off thy sin? How should that Lord condemn thee, Who died in order not to condemn thee? How should He drive thee away when thou returnest to His feet, He Who came from Heaven to seek thee when thou wert fleeing from Him? "What art thou afraid of, sinner? How shall He condemn thee penitent, Who died that you may not be condemned? How shall He cast thee off returning, Who came from Heaven seeking thee?" But greater still is the encouragement given us by this same Saviour of ours, when, speaking by Isaias, He says: *Behold, I have graven thee upon my hands; thy walls are always before my eyes.*—(Is. xlix., 16). Be not distrustful, My sheep; see how much thou didst cost Me. I keep thee engraved upon My hands, in these Wounds which I have suffered for thee; these are ever reminding Me to help thee, and to defend thee from thine enemies: love Me, and have confidence.

Yes, my Jesus, I love Thee, and feel confidence in Thee. To rescue me, yea, this has cost Thee dear; but to save me will cost Thee nothing. It is Thy will that all should be saved, and that none should perish. If my sins cause me to dread, Thy goodness reassures me; more desirous as Thou art to do me good than I am to receive it. Ah, my beloved Redeemer, I will say to Thee with Job: *Even though thou shouldst kill me, yet will I hope in thee, and thou wilt be my Saviour.*—(Job xiii., 15).

Wert Thou even to drive me away from Thy Presence, O my Love, yet would not I cease from hoping in Thee, Who art my Saviour. These Wounds of Thine and this Blood encourage me to hope for every good from Thy mercy. I love Thee, O dear Jesus, I love Thee and I hope in Thee.

II.

The glorious St. Bernard one day in sickness saw himself before the Judgment-seat of God where the devil was accusing him of his sins, and telling him that he did not deserve Paradise: "It is true that I deserve not Paradise," the Saint replied, "but Jesus has a twofold title to this kingdom,—in the first place, as being by nature Son of God; in the next place, as having purchased it by His death. He contents Himself with the first of these, and the second He makes over to me; and therefore it is that I ask and hope for Paradise." We, too, can say the same; for St. Paul tells us that the will of Jesus Christ to die consumed by sufferings, had for its end the obtaining of Paradise for all sinners that are penitent, and resolved to amend: *And, being perfected, he was made the cause of eternal salvation to all that obey him.*—(Heb. viii., 9). And hence the Apostle subjoins: *Let us run to the fight proposed unto us, looking on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith, who, having joy proposed unto him, underwent the cross, despising the shame.*—(Heb. xii., 1, 2). Let us go forth with courage to fight against our enemies, fixing our eyes on Jesus Christ, Who, together with the merits of His Passion, offers us the victory and the crown.

Ah, my loving Father, I thank Thee for having given me this Thy Son for my Saviour; I offer to Thee His death; and for the sake of His merits, I pray Thee for mercy. And ever do I return thanks to Thee, O my Redeemer, for having given Thy Blood and Thy life to deliver me from eternal death. "We pray Thee, therefore, help Thy servants, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious Blood." Help us, then, Thy rebellious servants, since Thou hast redeemed us at so great a cost. O Jesus, my one and only Hope, Thou dost love me.

Thou hast power to do all things; make me a Saint. If I am weak, do Thou give me strength; if I am sick, in consequence of the sins I have committed, do Thou apply to my soul one drop of Thy Blood and heal me. Give me Thy love and final perseverance, making me die in Thy grace. Give me Paradise; through Thy merits do I ask it of Thee, and hope to obtain it. I love Thee, O my most lovely God, with all my soul; and I hope to love Thee always. Oh, help a miserable sinner, who is wishing to love Thee.

Spiritual Reading.

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH.

13.—ST. AGATHA, VIRGIN.

(February 5).

This holy virgin and Martyr is held in great veneration by the Greek as well as the Latin Church; and although her original Acts have not been preserved, many well-authenticated facts concerning her Martyrdom are found in the Bollandists, Surius, and others. She was a native of Sicily, and descended from a noble and opulent family. These circumstances, added to her extraordinary beauty, inflamed Quintianus, a man of consular dignity, with such love of her that he resolved to compel her to become his wife. The edicts of the Emperor Decius against the Christians having been published, he ordered Agatha to be arrested as a Christian, and conducted to Catania where he then resided.

The holy virgin having heard the proclamation against the Christians, retired to a solitary place in order to avoid the snares of Quintianus, concerning which she had received some intimation. The emissaries of the governor, however, discovered her place of concealment, and after having been arrested, she prayed in the following manner: "O Jesus Christ, Lord of all things, Thou seest my heart, and knowest my desire, which is

to possess only Thee, since I have consecrated myself entirely to Thee. Preserve me, dear Lord, from this tyrant, and enable me to overcome the devil who layeth snares for my soul."

When the Saint appeared before Quintianus, in order the more easily to overcome her modesty, he gave her up to Aphrodisia, an abominable woman who, together with her daughters, kept an infamous house. In this infamous house the Saint suffered greater torture than the darkest and most fetid dungeon could cause. All the arts of Aphrodisia and her partners in crime were unceasingly applied, in order to induce the Saint to comply with the wishes of Quintianus; but Agatha, who from her infancy had been consecrated to Jesus Christ, was enabled by His Divine grace to overcome all their attempts.

Quintianus, having been informed that the efforts of Aphrodisia for an entire month had been employed in vain, commanded that the Saint should be again brought before him. He upbraided her that, being free born and noble, she had allowed herself to be seduced into the humble servitude of the Christians. The holy virgin courageously confessed that she was a Christian, and that she knew of no nobility more illustrious, nor liberty more real, than to be a servant of Jesus Christ. In order to give the governor to understand how infamous were the deities which he adored and desired her to worship, she asked whether he would wish that his wife should be a prostitute, like Venus, or that he himself should be considered an incestuous adulterer like Jupiter. Quintianus, irritated at her rebuke, commanded her to be buffetted and led to prison. The following day she was again summoned, and asked whether she had resolved to save her life. She replied: "God is my Life and my Salvation." The governor then put her to the torture; but perceiving how little it affected her, he commanded her breasts to be lacerated, and afterwards cut off; a sentence which was executed with barbarous cruelty.

Quintianus then remanded the Saint to prison, commanding that her wounds should be left undressed, in order that she might expire under the torture. But at midnight St. Peter appeared to her in a vision, completely

cured her wounds, and freed her from all pain. During the whole of that night there appeared in the interior of the prison so resplendent a light that the guards fled in terror, leaving the door of her dungeon open, so that she could have escaped, as the other prisoners advised her, but she was unwilling, as she said, to lose by flight the crown that was being prepared for her in Heaven.

Quintianus, in no way moved by her miraculous cure, but on the contrary more irritated, after four days devised new torments for the Saint. He commanded that she should be rolled over broken tiles, mixed with burning coals. But she endured all with constancy, and while the tyrant was planning fresh torments, the Saint, perceiving that her life was drawing to a close, made the following prayer: "O Lord, my Creator, Who hast preserved me from my infancy, hast given me strength to overcome these torments, and hast taken from me the love of the world, receive now my soul. It is time that I should at last pass from this miserable life to the fruition of Thy glory." Just as she had finished these words, she tranquilly expired, and went to be united to God to praise Him and love Him forever. This happened in 251. St. Agatha is mentioned in the Canon of the Mass.

Evening Meditation.

WHEN JESUS APPEARS MOST LOVELY.

I.

The Incarnate Word was called by the Sacred Spouse, *All lovely; such is my beloved.*—(Cant. v., 16). At whatever period of His life Jesus Christ presents Himself to us, He appears altogether desirable and most worthy of love, whether we see Him as an Infant in the stable, as a Boy in the workshop of St. Joseph, as a Solitary meditating in the desert, or bathed in sweat as He went preaching through Judea. But in no other form does He appear more loving that when nailed to the Cross on

which the immense love He bears us forced Him to die. St. Francis de Sales has said, the Mount of Calvary is the Hill of Lovers. All love which does not take its rise from the Passion of the Saviour is weak. How miserable is the death where there is no love of the Redeemer! Let us stop, then, and consider that this Man, nailed to the Tree of shame, is our true God, and that He is here suffering and dying for nothing but the love of us.

Ah, my Jesus, if all men would be still and contemplate Thee on the Cross, believing with a lively Faith that Thou art their God, and that Thou hast died for their salvation, how could they live far from Thee and without Thy love? And how could I, knowing all this, have displeased Thee so often? If others have offended Thee, they have at least sinned in darkness; but I have sinned in the light. But these pierced Hands, this wounded Side, this Blood, these Wounds which I see in Thee, make me hope for pardon and Thy grace. I am grieved, my Love, for having ever so despised Thee. But now I love Thee with all my heart; and my greatest grief is the remembrance of my having despised Thee. This grief, however, is a sign that Thou hast pardoned me. O burning Heart of my Jesus, inflame my poor heart with Thy love! O sorrowful Mother Mary, make me faithful in loving Jesus!

II.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?—(Matt. xxvii., 46).

Oh, who shall not compassionate the Son of God, dying of grief on a Cross, for the love of men? He is tormented externally in His body by innumerable Wounds, and internally He is so afflicted and sad that He seeks solace for His great sorrow from the Eternal Father; but His Father, in order to satisfy His Divine Justice, abandons Him, and leaves Him to die desolate and deprived of every consolation.

O desolate death of my dear Redeemer, thou art my hope. O my abandoned Jesus, Thy merits make me hope that I shall not remain abandoned and separated from Thee

forever in hell. I do not care to live in consolation on this earth; I embrace all the pains and desolations that Thou mayest send me. He is not worthy of consolation who by offending Thee has merited for himself eternal torments. It is enough for me to love Thee and to live in Thy grace. This alone do I beg of Thee, let me nevermore see myself deprived of Thy love. Let me be abandoned by all; but do not Thou abandon me in this extremity. I love Thee, my Jesus, Who didst die abandoned for me. I love Thee, my only Good, my only Hope, my only Love!

Saturday—Fifth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

CONFIDENCE IN THE INTERCESSION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

HER POWER TO HELP US.

Consider how great are the grounds of hope the soul has that trusts in the intercession of the great Mother of God. Behold the words applied by the Church to Mary on her Festivals: *He that shall find me shall find life and shall have salvation from the Lord.*—(Prov. viii., 35). It is impossible for a true and persevering client of Mary to be lost, for she can want neither the power nor the will to assist him.

I.

He that shall find me shall find life and shall have salvation from the Lord. He that shall find me, says Mary, shall find the life of grace here, and eternal glory hereafter. Addressing the Divine Mother, St. Anselm

goes so far as to say that, as it is impossible for a person who is not devoted to Mary and protected by her, to be saved, so, on the other hand, it is impossible for him to be lost who recommends himself to Mary, and is regarded by her with love. St. Antoninus, says that all those that are defended by this great Queen are necessarily saved. St. Bonaventure writes that they that obtain the protection of Mary shall, even while they live on this earth, be acknowledged as companions by the Saints in glory, and that they that carry the badge of servant of Mary be written in the Book of Life. Thus to be devoted to Mary is a mark of predestination. The Angelic Doctor says that Mary is called *the Star of the sea* because, as navigators are directed to the port by means of the pole star, so Christians are guided to Paradise by Mary.

Should a person truly devoted to Mary be lost it would be because she is either unable or unwilling to assist him. "But no," says St. Bernard, "she can neither lack the power nor the will." It is impossible for a true and persevering client of Mary to be lost; because she can neither want the power nor the will to assist him. To inspire us with confidence, then, in this great advocate, the holy Church invokes her under the title of *Powerful Virgin. Virgo potens, ora pro nobis!* Yes, that God Who is omnipotent, has, as she herself has said, given her great power. *He that is mighty hath done great things to me.*—(Luke i., 49).

My Lady, if thou pray for me, I shall be saved; for thou dost obtain by thy prayers whatsoever thou wishest. Pray, then, for me, O great Mother of God: for thy Son hears thee, and grants whatever thou askest. It is true that I am unworthy of thy protection, but thou hast never abandoned a soul that had recourse to thee. O Mary, I consign my soul to thee; thou hast to save it. Obtain for me perseverance in the Divine grace, and the love of thy Son and of thee.

II.

St. Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, has written: "The Son is pleased that the Mother should pray to

Him, because He wishes to grant her whatever she asks, in order to repay her for the favour received from her in giving Him her flesh." St. Bridget heard Jesus say to Mary: "Ask what you wish from Me, for your petition cannot be fruitless." My Mother, ask of Me what you wish; you know that I cannot reject any of your petitions. He then added: "Because you refused Me nothing on earth, I will refuse nothing to you in Heaven." You refused Me nothing while I lived on earth; it is right that I refuse you nothing now that you are with Me in Heaven.

But what is the principal reason the prayers of Mary are so powerful before God? St. Antoninus says: "The prayer of the Mother of God partakes of the nature of a command; hence it is impossible that she should not be heard." The prayers of Mary, being the prayers of a mother, partake in a certain manner of the nature of a command, and therefore they cannot be rejected. Hence, Blessed Albert the Great, used to repeat the words of the Church: *Show thyself a mother!*—in this sense: O Lady, show thyself a mother! Ask thy Son, as His Mother, to have mercy on us. Cosmas of Jerusalem asserts that the protection of Mary is omnipotent: *Omniopotens auxilium tuum, O Maria.* Yes, says Richard of St. Laurence, it is but just that the Mother should share the power of the Son. The Son is *omnipotent by nature*, the Mother is *omnipotent by grace;* that is, she obtains by her prayers whatsoever she wishes.

Let a sinner be ever so abandoned, says St. Gregory of Nicomedia, if he has recourse to Mary, she will save him by her intercession. O Mother of God, thou hast invincible power that thy clemency may not be conquered by the multitude of our sins. Nothing can resist thy power since the Creator regards as His own the glory of His Mother. "Thou, then," says St. Peter Damian, "canst do all things, for thou canst inspire even those who are in despair with hopes of salvation." As often as the devil tempts us to diffidence, let us turn to Mary, and say to her, with St. Germanus: "Thou, O Mary, art omnipotent in saving sinners; thy prayers are all-powerful with God, because thou art Mother of true Life."

O my Queen, I love thee, and I hope always to love thee. Do thou also love me. Take me under thy protection and have pity on me: grant me this favour through the love thou bearest thy Son. Behold the confidence that I place in thy clemency, and do not cease to assist me in all my wants. I know that thou wilt not cease to help me as often as I recommend myself to thee; but obtain for me also the grace to have recourse to thee in all my temptations, and in all my dangers of losing God. Assist me, particularly at the hour of my death. Obtain for me the grace that with my last breath I may pronounce thy name, and the Name of thy Son, saying: Jesus and Mary, to you I recommend my soul!

Spiritual Reading.

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH.

14.—ST. LEO OF PATARA.

(February 18).

At Patara, in Lycia, a great festival was once being celebrated in honour of a certain idol, at which a great concourse assembled. Many went there through fear as an edict had been published commanding the attendance of all. But St. Leo, who was a good Christian, departed from the city, and went to perform his devotions before the relics of St. Paregorius who had died for the Faith some short time previously. Upon his return home, St. Paregorius appeared to him in a vision, standing at the opposite side of a torrent, and inviting him to pass over.

St. Leo hence conceived a great hope that he would be honoured with Martyrdom; and going some days after to make a second visit to the tomb of St. Paregorius, he passed by the temple of fortune, where many lanterns burned before the idol. Impelled by a special impulse of the Holy Ghost, he entered the temple and threw down the lights; but the idolaters, enraged at the insult offered

to their idol, raised such a clamour, that the governor heard of the affair, and ordered that the Saint should be brought before him.

When Leo made his appearance, the governor rebuked him for the outrage he had committed against the gods, in violation of the commands of the sovereign. The Saint animated with a holy zeal, replied : " Thou speakest to me of the gods, as if there were many. There is but One God, and Jesus Christ is His Only-Begotten Son. Since statues of stone and wood are devoid of sense and feeling, of what use can lanterns be to them? If thou hadst the knowledge of the true God, thou wouldst not worship these false deities. Oh, do abandon this vain superstition, and adore our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ !"

The governor said : " Thou dost, then, exhort me to become a Christian? Better it were for thee to conform to the general practice, lest thy rashness be punished as it deserves." The Saint with increased ardour replied : " I see about me a multitude of those who, blindly persevering in error, despise the true God; but I am a Christian notwithstanding, and follow the instructions of the Apostles. If this deserve chastisement, award it; for I am determined to suffer every torture, rather than become the slave of the devil. Others may do as they please, since they are solicitous merely for the present, and are reckless of the future life which is to be obtained only by sufferings. The Scripture tells us that *narrow is the gate, and strait is the way, that leadeth to life.*" —(Matt. vii., 14).

The governor observed : " Since, then, the way of the Christians is narrow; exchange it for ours, which is wide and commodius." Leo answered : " I have said that the way is narrow, because it is one of affliction and of persecutions suffered for justice sake; but it is wide enough for those who walk therein, because their Faith and the hope of an eternal reward, make it so to them. The love of virtue maketh that easy which to thee seemeth difficult. On the contrary, the road of vice is in reality narrow, and leads to an eternal precipice."

This discourse was most unpalatable to the pagans who accordingly exclaimed that the impious man who had spoken against their religion, should be silenced. The governor then asked St. Leo whether he would sacrifice; and being answered that his compliance was totally impossible, he ordered him to be scourged. Although this command was most cruelly executed, the Saint suffered without a groan; whereupon the governor threatened still greater torments; but the Saint answered: "I know not these gods, and will never sacrifice to them." "At least," said the governor, "say that our gods are great, and I will dismiss thee, for I have compassion on thy old age." The Saint replied: "They are great for the destruction of those souls that believe in them." The governor, infuriated at this reply, said: "I will order thee to be dragged over stones till thou art torn to pieces." The Saint replied: "I shall welcome any kind of death that procures me the kingdom of Heaven, and that blessed life which I shall enjoy in company with the Saints, upon my departure from this world."

The tyrant continued to importune him to sacrifice, or at least to acknowledge that the gods could save him from death. The Saint replied: "Thou art very weak, since thou dost nothing but threaten, without putting thy threats into execution." The populace, being enraged at this reply, obliged the judge to condemn the Saint to be tied by the feet and dragged through a torrent.

St. Leo finding himself about to obtain the accomplishment of his desire to die for Jesus Christ, raised his eyes to Heaven and prayed after the following manner: "I thank Thee, O God, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, for granting me the grace to follow Thy servant Paregorius. I praise Thee, because Thou hast enabled me, by Martyrdom, to cancel my past sins. I commend my soul to the care of Thy holy Angels, that it may be saved from the perdition prepared for the wicked. I beseech Thee, by that which it is my blessed lot to suffer, to have mercy on those who are the cause thereof; and since Thou desirest not the death of the sinner, grant them the grace

to recognize Thee as the Lord of the universe. May all that which I suffer in the Name of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, redound to Thy glory for ever and ever. Amen." As soon as he pronounced the word *Amen*, he rendered up his soul to God, and went to enjoy the crown to which St. Paregorius had invited him.

The executioners cast the body into a deep pit in order to break it to pieces; but it was taken thence and found entire, with only a few slight bruises, and the face appeared comely and smiling.

Evening Meditation.

THE VANITY OF THE WORLD.

I.

Only the grave, says holy Job, *remaineth for me.*—(Job xvii., 1). Days and years pass away, pleasures, honours and riches pass away, and what will be the end? Death will come and strip us of all, and we shall be buried in the grave to corrupt and moulder into dust, deserted and forgotten by all. Alas! how, in the end of our lives, will the remembrance of all we have acquired in this world serve for nothing but to increase our anguish and the uncertainty of our salvation!

O death, O death, never depart from before my eyes! O God, do Thou enlighten me!

My life is cut off as by a weaver.—(Is. xxxviii., 12). How many, in the midst of executing their long contemplated designs, are overtaken by death and deprived of all things! Ah, with what pain and remorse will the goods of this world be regarded on the bed of death, by those who have been unduly attached to them! To worldlings who are spiritually blind the goods of this present life appear great; but death will discover what they really are,—dust, smoke, and vanity. In the light

of this last candle all the dazzling grandeur of this world will vanish and disappear. The greatest fortunes, the highest honours, when considered on the bed of death, will lose all their value and splendour. The shadow of death will obscure even crowns and sceptres.

Grant me, O God, Thy holy grace, for this alone is all I desire. I am grieved for having ever despised such a treasure. Jesus, have pity on me.

II.

Of what avail, then, will riches be at the hour of death, when nothing will remain for us but a wooden coffin and a winding-sheet? Of what avail will be the honours which we have acquired; when no others will now remain for us but a funeral procession and a tomb, which will not be able to afford us the least satisfaction, if our souls should be lost? And of what avail will the beauty of the body be; when the body itself will become a mass of worms, infect the air with its stench, and excite horror in all who behold it?

My dear Redeemer, although I knew that by sinning I would forfeit Thy friendship, yet did I sin; but I hope for pardon from Thee Who hast died to purchase pardon for me. O that I had never offended Thee, my good God! I behold the love which Thou hast shown me; and this increases my grief for having displeased Thee Who art so good a Father. I love Thee, O Lord, and will never live without loving Thee; give me perseverance. Mary, my Mother, pray to Jesus for me.

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

"*IN MUCH TRIBULATION WITH JOY OF THE HOLY GHOST.*"

—(Epistle of Sunday. 1 Thess. 1, 2—10).

"The Cross of Christ," says St. John Chrysostom, "is the key of Paradise." *Crux Christi clavis Paradisi.* But it is necessary, says the Saint, to bear tribulations in peace. If we wish to be saved we must submit to trials. Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.—(Acts xiv., 21).

I.

It is necessary, says St. John Chrysostom, to bear tribulations in peace; for if you accept them with resignation you shall gain great merit; but if with reluctance, you will increase instead of diminishing your misery. If we wish to be saved we must submit to trials. To holy souls the most severe afflictions are the temptations by which the devil impels them to offend God: but they who bear these temptations with patience, and banish them by turning to God for help, shall acquire great merit. *And*, says St. Paul, *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with the temptation issue that you may be able to bear it.*—(1 Cor. x., 13). God permits us to be molested by temptations, that, by banishing them, we may gain greater merit. *Blessed*, says the Lord, *are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.* —(Matt. v., 5). They are *blessed*, because, according to the Apostle, our tribulations are momentary and very

light compared with the greatness of the eternal glory, they shall obtain for us in Heaven. *For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.*—(2 Cor. iv., 17). A great servant of God used to say, that Paradise is the home of the poor, of the persecuted, of the humble and afflicted. Hence, St. Paul says : *Patience is necessary for you, that, doing the will of God, you may receive the promise.*—(Heb. x., 36). Speaking of the tribulations of the Saints, St. Cyprian asks : "What are they to the servants of God, whom Paradise invites?" Is it much for thee, to whom the eternal goods of Heaven are promised, to embrace the short afflictions of this life?

II.

When, then, God sends us tribulations, let us say with Job : *I have sinned, and indeed I have offended, and I have not received what I have deserved.*—(Job xxxiii., 27). O Lord, my sins merit far greater chastisement than that which Thou hast inflicted on me. We should even pray with St. Augustine : " Here burn, here cut : spare not here that Thou mayest spare in eternity." How frightful is the chastisement of the sinner of whom the Lord says : *Let us have pity on the wicked, but he will not learn justice.*—(Is. xxvi., 10). Let us abstain from chastising the impious : as long as they remain in this life they will continue to live in sin, and shall thus be punished with eternal torments. On this passage St. Bernard says : " Lord, I do not wish for such mercy, for such commiseration is worse than Thy anger !"

The man whom the Lord afflicts in this life has a certain proof that he is dear to God. *And*, said the Angel to Tobias, *because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptations should prove thee.* —(Tob. xii., 13). Hence, St. James pronounces the man blessed who is afflicted ; because after he shall have been proved by tribulation, *he will receive the crown of life.* —(James i., 12).

He who wishes to share in the glory of the Saints, must suffer in this life as the Saints have suffered. None of the Saints have been esteemed or treated well by the world—all of them have been despised and persecuted. In them have been verified the words of the Apostle : *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution.*—(2 Tim. iii., 12).

Great, indeed, are the advantages of tribulations. Indeed, as St. John Chrysostom says, " The Cross of Christ is the key of Paradise." *Crux Christi clavis Paradisi.* For all these afflictions, sorrows, persecutions and tears will one day have an end, and will, if we save our souls, become to us sources of joy and happiness in the Kingdom of Bliss.

Spiritual Reading.

HOW TO SUFFER TRIBULATIONS WITH MERIT FOR ETERNITY.

He who suffers tribulations in this world should, in the first place, abandon sin, and endeavour to recover the grace of God ; for as long as he remains in sin, the merit of all his suffering is lost. *If*, says St. Paul, *I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*—(1 Cor. xiii., 3). If you suffered all the torments of the Martyrs, or were burned alive, and were not in the state of grace, it would profit you nothing.

But to those who can suffer with God, and with resignation for God's sake, all the tribulations shall be a source of comfort and gladness. *Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.*—(Jo. xvi., 20). Hence, after having been insulted and beaten by the Jews, the Apostles departed from the Council full of joy ; because they had been maltreated for the love of Jesus Christ. *And they indeed went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for*

the name of Jesus.—(Acts v., 41). Hence, when God visits us with any tribulations, we must say with Jesus Christ : *The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*—(Jo. xviii., 11). It is necessary to know that every tribulation, though it may come from men, is sent to us by God.

When we are surrounded on all sides with tribulations, and know not what to do, we must turn to God, Who alone can console us. Thus King Josaphat in his distress, said to the Lord : *As we know not what to do, we can only turn our eyes to thee.*—(2 Par. xx., 12). Thus David also in his tribulation had recourse to God, and God consoled him : *In my trouble I cried to the Lord and he heard me.*—(Ps. cxix., 1). We should turn to God and pray to Him, and never cease to pray till He hears us. *As the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress, so are our eyes unto the Lord our God until he have mercy on us.*—(Ps. cxxii., 2). We must keep our eyes continually raised to God, and must continue to implore His aid, until He is moved to compassion for our miseries. We must have great confidence in the Heart of Jesus Christ, and should not imitate certain persons, who at once lose courage if they do not feel they are heard as soon as they begin to pray. To them may be applied the words of the Saviour to St. Peter : *O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?*—(Matt. xiv., 31). When the favours which we ask are spiritual, or can be profitable to our souls, we should be certain of being heard, provided we persevere in prayer, and do not lose confidence. *All things whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you.*—(Mark xi., 24). In tribulations, then, we should never cease to hope with confidence that the Divine mercy will console us; and if our afflictions continue, we must say with Job : *Although he should kill me, I will trust in him.*—(Job xiii., 15).

Souls of little faith, instead of turning to God in their tribulations, have recourse to human means, and thus provoke God's anger, and remain in their miseries. *Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. Unless the Lord keep the city,*

he watcheth in vain that keepeth it.—(Ps. cxxvi., 1). On this passage St. Augustine writes : " He builds up; He enlightens our understanding; He leads us to Faith; and still we labour as though we were the master-workers !" All good, all help, must come from the Lord. Without Him creatures can give us no assistance.

The Lord complains by the mouth of His Prophet : *Is not the Lord in Sion? . . . Why then have they provoked me to wrath with their idols . . . Is there no balm in Galaad, or is there no physician there? Why then is not the wound of the daughter of my people closed?* —(Jer. viii., 22). Am I not in Sion ? Why then do men provoke me to anger by recurring to creatures which they convert into idols by placing in them all their hopes ? Do they seek a remedy for their miseries ? Why do they not seek it in Galaad, a mountain full of balsamic ointments which signify the Divine mercy ? There they can find the Physician and the remedy for all their evils. Why, then, says the Lord, do your wounds remain open ? Why are they not healed ? It is because you have not recourse to Me but to creatures, and because you confide in them and not in Me.

In another place the Lord says : *Am I become a wilderness to Israel, or a lateward springing land? Why then have my people said: We are revolted; we will come to thee no more? . . . But my people have forgotten me days without number.*—(Jer. ii., 31). Why, My children, do you say that you will have recourse to Me no more ? Am I become to you a barren land, which gives no fruit, or gives it too late ? Is it for this reason that you have so long forgotten Me ? By these complaints He manifests to us His desire that we pray to Him in order that He may be able to give us His graces. And He also gives us to understand that when we pray to Him, He is not slow, but instantly begins to assist us.

The Lord, says David, is not asleep when we turn to His Goodness, and ask the graces which are profitable to our souls. He hears us immediately, because He is anxious for our welfare. *Behold he shall neither slumber nor sleep that keepeth Israel.*—(Ps. cxx., 4). When we pray for temporal favours, St. Bernard says that God

" will give what we ask, or something more useful." He will grant us the grace which we desire, whenever it is profitable to our souls ; or He will give us a more useful grace, such as the grace to resign ourselves to the Divine will, and to suffer with patience our tribulations, so as to merit a great increase of glory in Heaven.

Evening Meditation.

PRAYING FOR OTHERS—ESPECIALLY POOR SINNERS.

I.

Making a remembrance of you in our prayers without ceasing.—(Ep. of Sunday).

How pleasing to Jesus Christ are prayers for sinners ! " Assist Me, O My daughter, to save souls by your prayers,"—said Jesus one day to Sister Seraphina de Capri. No souls that really love God neglect to pray for poor sinners.

It is quite certain that the prayers of others are of great use to sinners, and are very pleasing to God. And God complains of His servants who do not recommend sinners to Him, as He once complained to St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi to whom He said : " *See, my daughter, how Christians are in the devil's hands: if My elect did not deliver them by their prayers they would be devoured.*" But God especially requires this of Priests and Religious. The same Saint used to say to her nuns : " My sisters, God has not separated us from the world that we should only do good for ourselves, but also that we should appease Him in behalf of sinners." And God one day said to her, " I have given to you, My chosen spouses, the City of Refuge (*i.e.*, the Passion of Jesus Christ), that you may have a place where you may obtain help for My creatures. Therefore have recourse to it and thence stretch forth a helping hand to My creatures who

are perishing, and even lay down your lives for them." For this reason the Saint, inflamed with holy zeal, used to offer God the Blood of the Redeemer fifty times a day on behalf of sinners, and was quite consumed with the desire she had for their conversion. She used to say: "What pain it is, O Lord, to see how one could help Thy creatures by giving one's life for them, and not be able to do so!" In every exercise she recommended sinners to God; and it is written in her life that she scarcely passed an hour in the day without praying for them. Frequently, too, she arose in the middle of the night, and went before the Blessed Sacrament to pray for them; and yet for all this, when she was once found bathed in tears, on being asked the cause, she answered, "Because I seem to myself to do nothing for the salvation of sinners." She went so far as to offer to endure even the pains of hell for their conversion, provided that in that place she might still love God; and often God gratified her by inflicting on her grievous pains and infirmities for the salvation of sinners. She prayed especially for Priests, seeing that their good life was the occasion of salvation to others, while their bad life was the cause of ruin to many; and therefore she prayed God to visit their faults upon her, saying, "Lord, make me die and return to life again as many times as is necessary to satisfy Thy justice for them!" And it is related in her Life that the Saint, by her prayers, did indeed release many souls from the hands of Lucifer.

I thank Thee, O Lord, for the sweet promise of pardon Thou hast made to sinners,—to forget the sins of those who repent. *I will not remember any of their iniquities.* —(Ezech. xviii., 22). It is all the fruit of Thy Passion, O Jesus! O sweet Passion! O sweet mercy! O sweet love of Jesus Christ!

II.

No souls that really love God neglect to pray for poor sinners. For how is it possible for a person who loves God, and knows what love He has for our souls, and what Jesus Christ has done and suffered for their salvation, and

how our Saviour desires us to pray for sinners,—how is it possible, I say, that he should be able to look with indifference on the multitudes of poor souls who are living without God, and are slaves of hell, without being moved to importune God with frequent prayers to give light and strength to those wretched beings so that they may rise from the miserable state of perdition in which they are slumbering? True it is that God has not promised to grant our requests when those for whom we pray put a positive impediment in the way of their conversion; but still, God of His goodness has often deigned, at the Prayer of His servants, to bring back the most blind and obstinate sinners to a state of salvation by means of extraordinary graces. Therefore let us never omit, when we say or hear Mass, when we receive Holy Communion, when we make our Meditation or the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament, to recommend poor sinners to God. And a learned author says that he who prays for others will find that his prayers for himself are heard much sooner.

Oh, how many souls are sometimes converted, not so much by sermons, as by the prayers of Religious. *Pray for one another that you may be saved, for the continual prayer of the just man availeth much.*—(James v., 16).

O great God, Thou art indignant against sinners and with too great reason, for they repay Thee with ingratitude for all the great love Thou hast shown them. I offer Thee Thine own Son. May this Victim appease Thee and move Thee to have pity on all poor sinners. Give them light and strength to come out of the miserable state in which they are blindly living. I pray Thee for all, but especially for myself who have been more ungrateful than others in offending and despising Thee.

O Mary, hope of sinners, do thou obtain pardon for me, perseverance, and the love of Jesus Christ.

Monday—Sixth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

VANITAS VANITATUM.

I.—THE GOODS OF THIS WORLD ARE WORTHLESS.

We cannot call the things of this life *ours* because we cannot take them with us into eternity. Where is the rich man that ever brought with him a piece of money? What king has ever carried with him a shred of his purple? Of what use, then, is it to us to gain the whole world if at death we lose all by losing our souls?

I.

What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?—(Matt. xvi., 26).

An ancient Philosopher called Aristippus was once shipwrecked and lost all his goods. When he reached the shore, the people, through respect for his great learning, presented him with an equivalent of all he had lost. He wrote to his friends, exhorting them to imitate his example, and to seek only the goods which cannot be wrested from them by shipwreck. Now, our relatives and friends who are in eternity exhort us from the other world to attend only to the acquisition of goods which even death cannot take from us. Death is called *the day of destruction*.—(Deut. xxxii., 35). It is the day of destruction, because on that day we shall lose all the goods of this earth,—its honours, riches and pleasures. Hence, according to St. Ambrose, we cannot call the things of this life *ours*, because we cannot take them with us into eternity. Our virtues alone accompany us to the next life.

What, then, says Jesus Christ, does it profit us to gain the whole world, if, at death we lose all by losing the soul? Ah! how many young men has this great maxim sent into the cloister! How many anchorites has it sent into the desert! And how many Martyrs has it encouraged to give their life for Jesus Christ! By this maxim St. Ignatius of Loyola drew many souls to God, particularly the soul of St. Francis Xavier who was then in Paris attached to the things of the world. "Francis," said the Saint one day, "reflect that the world is a traitor, which promises but does not perform. And though it should fulfil all its promises, it can never content your heart. But let us grant that it did make you happy, how long will the happiness last? Can it last longer than your life; and after death what will you take with you into eternity? Where is the rich man that has ever brought with him a piece of money, or a servant to attend him? What king has ever carried with him a shred of the purple as a badge of royalty?" At these words St. Francis abandoned the world, followed St. Ignatius, and became a Saint.

Ah, Jesus, my Redeemer, I thank Thee for making me see my folly and the evil I have done in turning my back on Thee Who hast given Thy Blood and Thy life for me. Thou didst not deserve to be treated by me as I have treated Thee. Behold! if death now came upon me, what should I find but sin and remorse of conscience, which would make me die with great disquietude! My Saviour, I confess that I have done evil, and committed a great error in leaving Thee, my Sovereign Good, for the miserable pleasures of this world. I am sorry from the bottom of my heart. Ah! through the sorrow which took away Thy life on the Cross, give me a sorrow for my sins which will make me weep during the remainder of my life over the injuries I have done Thee. My Jesus, pardon me; I promise to displease Thee no more, and to love Thee forever.

II.

Solomon confessed that *whatsoever his eyes desired he refused them not*—(Eccles. ii., 10); but after having

indulged in all the pleasures of this earth, he called the goods of the world *vanity of vanities—vanitas vanitatum*, Sister Margaret of St. Anne, a Discalced Carmelite, and daughter of the Emperor Rudolph II., used to say : " Of what use are kingdoms at the hour of death?" The Saints tremble at the thought of the uncertainty of their eternal salvation. Father Paul Segneri trembled and, full of terror, said to his confessor : " Father, what do you think—shall I be saved?" St. Andrew Avellino trembled and, with a torrent of tears, said : " Who knows whether I shall be saved or lost?" St. Louis Bertrand was so much terrified by this thought, that, during the night, in a fit of terror, he sprang out of bed, saying : " Perhaps I shall be lost!" And sinners, living in a state of damnation, sleep, and jest, and laugh!

O my Jesus, I am not worthy of Thy love which I have hitherto so much despised. But Thou hast said that Thou lovest him who loves Thee. I love Thee; love me, then, O Lord! I do not wish to be any longer at enmity with Thee. I renounce all the grandeurs and pleasures of the world, provided Thou lovest me. Hear me, O my God, for the love of Jesus Christ! He entreats Thee not to banish me from Thy Heart. To Thee I consecrate my whole being; to Thee I consecrate my life, and my joys, my senses, my soul, my body, my will, and my liberty. Accept me; reject not my offering as I have deserved for having so often refused Thy friendship : *cast me not away from thy face.*—(Ps. l., 13). Most holy Virgin, my Mother, Mary, pray to Jesus for me. In thy intercession I place unbounded confidence.

Spiritual Reading.

A CHRISTIAN'S RULE OF LIFE.

I.—THE MEANS WE MUST MAKE USE OF TO PERSEVERE IN THE GRACE OF GOD.

We must be fully persuaded, that in order to obtain eternal salvation, it is not sufficient *to wish* to be saved; but we must *take the means* which have been left us by

Jesus Christ. Otherwise, if we commit sins, it will not avail us in the Day of Judgment to excuse ourselves by saying that the temptations were great and we were weak; because God has given us the means, through His grace, to conquer all the assaults of our enemies. If, then, we will not take advantage of them, and are overcome, the fault is our own. All men desire to be saved; but because they omit to employ the means of salvation, they sin, and are lost.

I.—TO AVOID THE OCCASIONS OF SIN.

The first means is, *to avoid all occasions of sin*. It is impossible for any one who does not endeavour to fly from the occasions of sin, especially in the matter of sensual pleasures, to avoid falling into sin. St. Philip Neri said: "In the war of the senses, the conquerors are the *cowards* who fly." The occasion is like a veil put before our eyes, so that we can see nothing else—neither God, nor hell, nor the resolutions we have made. The Scripture says it is impossible for a man to walk on burning coals without being burnt: *Or can he walk upon hot coals and his feet not be burnt?*—(Prov. vi., 28). So it is morally impossible for any one to put himself voluntarily into the occasion of sin and not to fall, although he may have made a thousand resolutions and a thousand promises to God. This is clearly shown every day by the misery of so many poor souls who are plunged into vice for not avoiding the occasions. Any one who has had the evil habit of sins of impurity must know that, in order to restrain himself, it is not enough merely to avoid those occasions which are absolutely proximate; for if he does not also fly from those which are not altogether proximate, he will easily fall again. Nor must we allow ourselves to be deceived by the devil into thinking that the person towards whom we are tempted is a saint. It often happens that the more devout a person is, the stronger is the temptation. St. Thomas Aquinas says, that the holiest persons attract the most. The temptation will commence in a spiritual way, and will terminate carnally. The great servant of God, F.

Sertorio Caputo of the Society of Jesus, said that the devil first induces one to love a person's virtue, then the person, and then blinds a man and brings him to ruin. We must also fly from evil companions: we are too weak; the devil is continually tempting us and the senses drawing us to evil; the slightest suggestion of a bad companion is alone wanting to make us fall. Therefore the first thing that we have to do to save ourselves is to avoid evil occasions and bad companions. And we must in this matter use violence with ourselves, resolutely overcoming all human respect. Those who do not use violence with themselves will not be saved. It is true, that we must not put confidence in our own strength, but only in the Divine assistance; but God wills that we should do *our part* in using violence with ourselves, when it is necessary to do so, in order to gain Paradise: *The violent bear it away.*—(Matt. xi., 12).

II.—MENTAL PRAYER.

The second means is *mental prayer*. Without this, the soul will find it almost impossible to remain a length of time in the grace of God. The Holy Spirit says: *In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin.*—(Ecclus. vii., 40). He who often meditates on the Four Last Things, namely Death, Judgment, and the Eternity of hell and Paradise, will not fall into sin. These truths are not to be seen with the bodily eyes, but only with the eyes of the mind. If they are not meditated on, they vanish from the mind, and then the pleasures of the senses present themselves, and those who do not keep before themselves the eternal truths are easily taken up by them; and this is why so many abandon themselves to vice, and are damned. Christians know and believe that they must all die, and all be judged; but because they do not think about it, they live far from God. Without *mental prayer* there is no light, we walk in the dark; and walking in the dark, we do not see the danger we are in, we do not make use of the means we ought, nor pray to God to help us, and so we are lost. Without prayer we have neither light nor

strength to advance in the ways of God; because without prayer we do not ask God to give us His grace, and without His graces we shall certainly fall. It was for this reason that Blessed Bellarmine declared it to be morally impossible for a Christian *who did not meditate* to persevere in the grace of God. Whereas one who makes his Meditation every day can scarcely fall into sin; and if unhappily he should fall on some occasion, by continuing his prayer he will return immediately to God. It was said by a servant of God, that "*mental prayer* and *mortal sin* cannot exist together." Resolve, then, to make every day, either in the morning or in the evening,—but it is best in the morning,—half an hour's Meditation. It is sufficient that during the half hour you should entertain your thoughts by reading some book of Meditations, and from time to time to excite some good affection or aspiration. Above all, I beg you never to leave off this prayer (which you should practise at least once a day), although you may be in great aridity, and should feel great weariness in doing it. If you do not discontinue it, you will certainly be saved.

Together with prayer, it is of great use to make in private a Spiritual Reading out of some book which treats of the life of a Saint or of the Christian virtues, during half, or at least a quarter, of an hour. How many by reading a pious book have changed their way of living and become Saints!—like St. John Colombino, St. Ignatius Loyola, and so many others. It would be also a most useful thing if you were every year to make a Retreat in some Religious House. *But at any rate do not omit your daily Meditation.*

Evening Meditation.

TO PERSEVERE WE MUST CONQUER THE DEVIL.

I.

He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved.—(Matt. xxiv., 13).

St. Jerome says that many begin well but few persevere. Saul, Judas, Tertullian, began well, but ended badly because they did not persevere in grace. The Lord, says St. Jerome, requires not only the beginning of a good life, but also the end : it is the end that will be rewarded. St. Bonaventure says that the crown is given only to perseverance. Hence St. Laurence Justinian calls perseverance the "Gate of Heaven." No one can enter Paradise unless He finds the gate of Heaven. You have now renounced sin, and justly hope that you have been pardoned. You are, then, the friend of God : but remember that you are not yet saved. And when will you be saved? When you will have persevered to the end. *He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved.* Have you begun a good life? Thank the Lord for it : but St. Bernard warns you that to him who begins, a reward is only *promised*, and is *given* to him alone who perseveres. It is not enough to run for the prize; you must run till you win it. *So run*, says St. Paul, *that you may obtain.*—(1 Cor. ix., 24).

You have already put your hand to the plough, and you have begun to live well; but now you must tremble and fear more than ever. *With fear and trembling work out your salvation.*—(Phil. ii., 12). And why? Because if —which God forbid—you now look back and return to a life of sin, God will declare you unfit for Paradise. *No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*—(Luke ix., 62). At present, through the grace of God, you avoid evil occasions, you frequent the Sacraments, and make Meditation every day. Happy you if you continue to do

so, and if, when He comes to judge you, Jesus Christ will find you doing these things. *Blessed is that servant whom, when his lord shall come, he shall find so doing.*—(Matt. xxiv. 46). But do not imagine now that you have begun to serve God, there is, as it were, an end or a lessening of temptations. Listen to the advice of the Holy Ghost. *Son, when thou comest to the service of God . . . prepare thy soul for temptations.*—(Ecclus. ii., 1). Remember that now more than ever you must prepare yourself for conflicts, because your enemies, the world, the devil, and the flesh, will arm themselves now more than ever to fight against you in order to deprive you of all that you have acquired.

Ah my God, *cast me not away from thy face!* I know that Thou wilt never abandon me, unless I first abandon Thee. Experience of my own weakness makes me tremble lest I should again forsake Thee. Lord, it is from Thee I must receive the strength necessary to conquer hell, which labours to make me again its slave. This strength I ask of Thee for the sake of Jesus Christ.

II.

Denis the Carthusian says that the more a soul gives itself to God, the more strenuously hell labours to destroy it. And this is sufficiently expressed in the Gospel of St. Luke, where Jesus Christ says: *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through places without water, seeking rest, and not finding it, he saith: 'I will return into my house whence I came out.' And when he is come he findeth it swept and garnished. Then he goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and entering in, they dwell there. And the last state of that man is worse than the first.*—(Luke xi., 24). When banished from a soul, the devil finds no repose, and does everything in his power to return: he even calls companions to his aid; and if he succeeds in re-entering, the second fall of that soul will be far more ruinous than the first.

Consider, then, what arms you must use in order to defend yourselves against these enemies, and to preserve

your soul in the grace of God. To escape defeat, and to conquer the devil, there is no other defence than prayer. St. Paul says that we have to contend, not with men or flesh and blood like ourselves, but with the princes of hell: *Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers.*—(Eph. vi., 12). By these words the Apostle wishes to admonish us that we have not strength to resist such powerful enemies, and that we stand in need of aid from God. With His aid we shall be able to do all things. *I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.*—(Phil. iv., 13). Such is the language of St. Paul; such, too, should be our language. But this Divine aid is given only to those who pray for it. *Ask and you shall receive.* Let us, then, not trust to our purposes of amendment. If we trust in them, we shall be lost. Whenever the devil tempts us, let us place our entire confidence in the Divine assistance, and let us recommend ourselves to Jesus Christ and to the Most Holy Mary. We ought to do this particularly when tempted against chastity; for this is the most terrible of all temptations, and is the one by which the devil gains the most victories. We have not strength to preserve chastity; this strength must come from God. *And*, said Solomon, *as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent except God gave it, . . . I went to the Lord, and besought him.*—(Wis. viii., 21). In such temptations then, we must instantly have recourse to Jesus Christ and His Holy Mother, frequently invoking the most holy Names of Jesus and Mary. He who does this will conquer; he who neglects it will be lost.

O my Saviour, establish between Thee and me a perpetual peace, which will never be broken for all eternity. For this purpose I ask Thy love. He who loves not is dead. O God of my soul, it is by Thee I must be saved from this unhappy death. I was lost, Thou knowest it. It is Thy goodness alone which has brought me into the state in which I am at present, in which I hope I am Thy friend. Ah, my Jesus, through the painful death Thou didst suffer for my salvation, do not permit me ever more to lose Thee voluntarily. I love Thee above all things. I hope to see myself always

bound with this holy love, to die in the bonds of love and to live forever in the chains of Thy love. O Mary, thou art called the Mother of perseverance : through thee this great gift is dispensed. Through thy intercession I ask and hope to obtain it.

Tuesday—Sixth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE GOODS OF THIS WORLD ARE CONTEMPTIBLE.

St. Augustine bids us to regard not what the rich man possessed in life but what he took with him in death,—a fetid body and a rag of garment to rot with him. We should labour to become Saints, rich in those goods that will accompany us into the other world and content us for all eternity.

I.

There is a deceitful balance in his hand.—(Osee, xii., 7). We must weigh things in the balance of God, and not in the deceitful balance of the world. The goods of this life are miserable goods; they do not content the heart; they soon end. *My days have been swifter than a post: they have passed by as ships carrying fruits.*—(Job ix., 25, 26). The days of our life pass and fly away, and of all the pleasures of this earth, what remains? They have passed like a ship which leaves no trace behind! *As a ship that passeth through the waters, whereof, when it is gone by, the trace cannot be found.*—(Wis. v., 10). Ask the many rich and learned of the world, the many princes

and emperors who are now in eternity, what they possess of all the pomps and delights and grandeur they enjoyed in this life? They all answer: Nothing! Nothing! "O man," says St. Augustine, "you attend to what he had here; but attend rather to what he brings with him." You, says the Saint, regard only the goods the rich man possessed; but observe what he took with him at death, —a fetid body and a rag of garment to rot with him.

After death the grandees of the world are spoken of for a little while; but they are soon forgotten. *Their memory hath perished with a noise.*—(Ps. ix., 7). And if they have gone to hell, what do they do and say in that place of woe? They weep and say: *What hath pride profited us? Or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow.*—(Wis. v., 8, 9). What have pomps and riches profited us now that they are past away like a shadow and for us nothing remains but eternal torments, wailing and despair?

Ah, my Redeemer, Thou has suffered so many pains and ignominies for my sake; and I have loved the pleasures and vanities of this earth to such an excess, that, for sake of them I have often trampled on Thy grace. But, since Thou didst not cease to seek after me when I despised Thee, I cannot, O my Jesus, fear that Thou wilt now cast me away, when I seek and love Thee with my whole heart, and am more sorry for having offended Thee than for any other misfortune. O God of my soul, from this day forward I wish never more to offend Thee, even by a venial thought. Make known to me what is displeasing to Thee. I will not, for any earthly good, do what I know to be offensive to Thee. Make known to me what I must do in order to please Thee. I am ready to do it. I wish to love Thee with a true love.

II.

The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.—(Luke xvi., 8). How prudent are worldlings in earthly affairs! What toils do they

endure in order to obtain a situation, or to acquire an estate! With what care do they attend to the preservation of bodily health! They adopt the safest means, they select the best physicians, the best remedies, the purest air. But how careless are they about the concerns of the soul! And it is certain that health, situations, and possessions shall one day end; but the soul and eternity are everlasting. What do not the unjust, the vindictive, and voluptuous endure in order to attain their wicked purposes! And for their souls, they will suffer nothing! O God, in the light of the death-candle, worldlings know and confess their folly! Then they say: Oh, that I had left the world, and led a life of sanctity! Pope Leo the Eleventh said at the hour of death: *It were better for me to have been Brother Porter in my convent, than to be Pope.* Honorius the Third also said in his last illness: It would have been better for me to have remained in the kitchen of my Monastery to wash the plates. In his dying moments, Philip the Second, King of Spain, sent for his son, and throwing off his royal robes, showed him his breast eaten away by worms, and said to him: "Prince, behold how we die and how the grandeurs of this world end. Oh, that I had been a Lay Brother in some Religious community, and not a king." He then ordered a wooden cross to fastened round his neck by a cord, and having made all his arrangements for death, he said to his son: "I wished you to be present at this scene, that you may see how this world treats monarchs in the end. Their death is like that of the poorest subjects. In short, he who leads the most holy life is in the greatest favour with God." This same son, who was afterwards Philip the Third, dying at the age of forty-three years, said: "My subjects, in the sermon to be delivered at my funeral, let nothing be preached but this spectacle you now behold. Say that to be king, serves at death to excite regret and pain." He then exclaimed: "Oh, that I had never been a king! Oh, that I had lived in a desert to serve God! I should now go with greater confidence to present myself at God's tribunal, and should not now find myself in danger of being damned for ever." But these desires at the hour

of death serve only to increase the anguish and despair of those who have not loved God. "Therefore," says St. Teresa, "we should make no account of what ends with life; the true life consists in living in such a manner as not to have any reason to fear death." If, then, we wish to see the true value of earthly things, let us look at them from the bed of death, and say: These honours, these amusements, shall one day have an end: we ought, then, to labour to become Saints and rich in those goods alone which will accompany us into the other world, and content us for all eternity.

O my Jesus, I wish to make peace with Thee and to desire Thy grace more than any earthly good. For Thy sake I now renounce all the pleasures the world can give and I resolve to lose all rather than Thy grace. I embrace, O Lord, all the pains and crosses which shall come to me from Thy hands: give me the resignation which I stand in need of: *here burn, here cut.* Chastise me in this life, that in the next I may love Thee for ever. Mary, my Mother, to you I recommend my soul; do not ever cease to pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading.

A CHRISTIAN'S RULE OF LIFE.

Means of Perseverance (continued).

III.—THE FREQUENTATION OF THE SACRAMENTS.

The Third means is *the frequenting of the Sacraments of Confession and Communion.* By Confession the soul keeps itself purified; and by it not only obtains remission of sins, but also greater strength to resist temptations. For this purpose you should choose a spiritual director, and always confess to the same, consulting him on all more important matters, even in regard to your temporal affairs; and obey him in everything, especially if you are distressed by scruples. He who obeys his confessor need

not fear he will go astray : *He that heareth you, heareth me.*—(Luke x., 16). The voice of the confessor is the voice of God.

Holy Communion is called Heavenly Bread, because as common bread preserves the life of the body, so Communion preserves the life of the soul : *Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man . . . you shall not have life in you.*—(Jo. vi., 54). On the other hand, to those who often eat this Bread eternal life is promised : *If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever.*—(Jo. vi., 52). Therefore the Council of Trent calls Holy Communion " the medicine which delivers us from daily faults and preserves us from mortal sin." You should, then, resolve to go to Communion at least once a week, being determined not to give it up for anything in the world; as there is no affair of greater importance than that of your eternal salvation. Indeed, the longer you remain in the world, the greater need you have of assistance, because your temptations are greater. He who communicates most frequently will be freest from sin and will make greatest progress in Divine love. Only let him communicate with a good intention.

In order to derive more abundant fruits from Communion, he should spend half an hour after receiving in devout acts of thanksgiving.

IV.—TO HEAR MASS.

The Fourth means is *to hear Mass every day.* When we attend Mass we give more honour to God than all the Angels and Saints in Heaven can give Him, because theirs is the honour of creatures; but in the Mass we offer to God Jesus Christ Who gives Him an infinite honour.

But what is of the greatest importance is that those who hear Mass should make a special application to their own souls of the merits of the Passion of Jesus Christ. Mass should be heard for the same ends for which it was instituted : namely, (1) To honour Almighty God, (2) To thank Him for His benefits, (3) To make atonement for the punishment due to our sins, (4) to obtain Divine grace.

V.—THE VISIT TO THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT AND TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

The Fifth means is *to make a Visit every day to the Most Holy Sacrament* in some church, and to the Divine Mother before some devout image. Jesus Christ dwells on the altars of so many churches in order to dispense graces to all who come to visit Him; and thus the souls of those who practise this beautiful devotion receive innumerable benefits from it. The graces you ought especially to ask for, both from Jesus and Mary, are, the love of God, and holy perseverance till death.*

VI.—VOCAL PRAYER.

The Sixth means which I recommend you above all to practise is *holy prayer*. It is certain that without the Divine assistance we can do nothing good for our souls. But God has declared that graces are granted only to those who ask for them: *Ask, and it shall be given you.*—(Matt. vii., 7). Therefore, as St. Teresa says, he who asks not does not receive. It is a common opinion of the Holy Fathers of the Church, with St. Thomas, that without prayer it is impossible to persevere in the grace of God and to save one's soul. But he who prays is sure of the help of God. We have His word for it which cannot fail, repeated so often in the Sacred Gospels: *All things whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come to you.*—(Mark xi., 24). *Every one that asketh receiveth.*—(Luke xi., 10). *Amen, amen, I say unto you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you.*—(Jo. xvi., 23). God grants everything that we ask Him for in the Name of Jesus Christ. If, then, we wish to be saved, we must pray, and pray with *humility* and *confidence*, and above all with *perseverance*. And this is the reason why Meditation is so useful, because then we are reminded *to pray*; otherwise we forget to do so, and so are lost. St.

* In connection with what St. Alphonsus here lays down in regard to *Mass, Communion* and *Visit*, we recommend the Saint's own prayers for Mass and Communion and *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament* which have been recently published in one small volume (C.T.S., D.).—ED.

Teresa says, that out of her desire of seeing everyone saved, she would have wished to go to the top of a mountain and then to cry out, so as to be heard by all men : " Pray ! pray ! pray !" The ancient Fathers of the desert in their conferences decided that there was no better means of saving ourselves than by continually repeating the prayer of David : *Incline unto my aid, O God ! O Lord make haste to help me !*—(Ps. lxix., 2). Let this be our prayer also. Or else let us make use of the beautiful ejaculation of St. Leonard of Port-Maurice : " My Jesus, mercy !" And the two principal graces which we must always ask for are, the love of God and holy perseverance. We must always ask the same graces from the Most Holy Mary who is called the dispenser of all the Divine graces; and when we pray to her, she will certainly obtain them for us from God. Therefore St. Bernard thus exhorts us saying : " Let us seek grace, and let us seek it through Mary; for what she seeks she finds, and she cannot be disappointed."*

Evening Meditation.

TO PERSEVERE WE MUST CONQUER THE WORLD.

Let us see how we must conquer the world. The devil is a great enemy of our salvation, but the world is a worse enemy. If the devil did not make use of the world and of wicked men (by whom we mean the world), he would not obtain the victories he gains. *But*, says Jesus Christ, *beware of men.*—(Matt. x., 17). Men are often worse than devils; for devils are put to flight when we pray and invoke the most holy Names of Jesus and Mary. But when a person gives a pious and becoming answer to wicked companions who tempt him to sin, they redouble

* We most earnestly recommend to all St. Alphonsus' book, *Prayer, the Great Means of Salvation.* An excellent edition recently published. Dublin, Talbot Press, Ltd.; America, Herder & Co.—Ed.

their efforts, they treat him with ridicule, upbraiding him with vulgarity and want of education; and when they can say nothing else, they will call him a hypocrite who only pretends to sanctity. To escape such derision and reproach, certain weak souls miserably associate with these ministers of Lucifer, and return to the vomit. Be persuaded that if you wish to lead a holy life, you must expect the ridicule and contempt of the wicked. *The wicked,* says the Holy Ghost, *loathe them that are in the right way.*—(Prov. xxix., 27). He who lives in sin cannot bear the sight of those who live according to the Gospel. And why? Because their life is a continual reproach to him; and therefore to avoid the pain of remorse caused by the good example of others, he would wish that all should imitate his own wickedness. There is no remedy. The Apostle tells us that he who serves God will be persecuted by the world. *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*—(2 Tim. iii., 12). All the Saints have been persecuted. Who was more holy than Jesus Christ? The world persecuted Him so as to cause Him to bleed to death on a Cross.

There is no help for this; for the maxims of the world are absolutely opposed to the maxims of Jesus Christ. What the world esteems, Jesus Christ has called folly. *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.* —(1 Cor. iii., 19). And the world regards as folly what Jesus Christ has strongly recommended,—such as crosses, pains and contempt. *For the word of the cross, to them indeed that perish, is foolishness.*—(1 Cor. i., 18). But if the wicked revile and reproach us, let us console ourselves with the reflection that God blesses and praises us. *They will curse, and thou wilt bless.*—(Ps. cviii., 28). Is it not enough for us to be praised by God, by Mary, by the Angels, the Saints, and all good men? Let us, then, leave sinners to say what they please, and let us continue to please God Who is grateful and faithful to all who serve Him. The greater the opposition and difficulty we meet in doing good, the more we shall please God and treasure up merits for ourselves. Let us imagine that we are alone with God in this world. When the wicked treat us with derision, let us recommend them

to the Lord; let us thank Him for giving us the light which He does not give to these miserable men, and let us pursue our way. We must not be ashamed to appear like Christians; for, if we are ashamed of Jesus Christ, He protests that He will be ashamed of us on the Day of Judgment. *For he that shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him the Son of man shall be ashamed, when he shall come in his majesty.*—(Luke ix., 26).

Henceforth, O my God, Thou shalt be my only Love, my only Good. O Eternal Father, through the merits of Jesus Christ I ask of Thee final perseverance in Thy grace and in Thy love. I know that Thou wilt grant it to me whenever I ask it. But who assures me that I shall be ever careful to ask this perseverance from Thee? Hence, O my God, I ask perseverance, and the grace to ask it always. O Mary, my advocate, my refuge, and my hope, obtain for me by thy intercession, the gift of constancy in always asking of God the grace of final perseverance. Through the love which thou bearest Jesus Christ, I ask thee to obtain for me this gift.

II.

If we wish to save our souls, we must resolve to suffer, and to do violence to ourselves. *How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life.*—(Matt. vii., 14). *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent bear it away.*—(Matt. xi., 12). He who does not violence to himself, will not be saved. There is no remedy, for if we wish to practise virtue, we must act in opposition to our rebellious nature. In the beginning, it is particularly necessary to do violence to ourselves in order to root out bad habits, and to acquire virtuous habits. When good habits are once acquired, the observance of the Divine law becomes easy and even sweet. Our Lord said to St. Bridget that when in the practice of virtue a person suffers the first prickings of the thorns with patience and courage, these thorns afterwards become roses. Be careful, then, beloved Christian; Jesus Christ now says to you what He said to the paralytic:

Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee.—(Jo. v., 14). Remember, says St. Bernard, that if you should have the misfortune to relapse into sin, your *relapse* will be more disastrous than in your first *fall*. Woe, says the Lord, to them who begin to walk in the way of God and afterwards forsake it. *Woe to you apostate children.*—(Is. xxx., 1). Such sinners are punished as rebels against God's light. *They have been rebellious to the light.* —(Job xxiv., 13). The chastisement of these rebels who have been favoured by God with great light, and have been afterwards unfaithful to Him, is to remain in blindness, and thus die in their sins. *But if the just man turn himself away from his justice . . . shall he live? All his justices which he hath done shall not be remembered; in the prevarication by which he hath prevaricated, and in his sin which he hath committed, in them he shall die,* —(Ezech. xviii., 24).

Ah, my God, such a chastisement I have often deserved, because I have, through the light which Thou gavest me, renounced sin, and have miserably returned to it. I thank Thy infinite mercy for not having abandoned me in my blindness by leaving me entirely destitute of light, as I have deserved. Great, then, O my Jesus, are my obligations to Thee, and great should be my ingratitude, were I again to turn my back upon Thee. No, my Redeemer, the mercies of the Lord I will sing forever. I hope that during the remainder of my life, and for all eternity, I will always sing and praise Thy mercies by loving Thee always, and never more seeing myself deprived of Thy graces. The great ingratitude with which I have hitherto treated Thee, and which I now hate and curse above every evil, will serve to make me weep bitterly over the injuries I have done Thee, and to inflame me still more with the love of Thee, Who, after I had given Thee so many grievous offences, hast bestowed upon me so many great graces. Yes, I love Thee, O my God, worthy of infinite love.

Wednesday—Sixth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

WE MUST WORK FOR HEAVEN.

What is our life on this earth but a scene that ends very soon and passes away? *The fashion of this world passeth away.* The world is a stage; one generation passes away, another appears! "Thus end the grandeurs and crowns of this world!" exclaimed Francis Borgia, "Henceforth I will serve a Master Who can never die!"

1.

The time is short: it remaineth that . . . they that use this world be as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away.—(1 Cor. vii., 29, 31). What is our life on this earth but a scene which passes away and ends very soon? *The fashion of this world passeth away.* "The world," says Cornelius à Lapide, "is like a stage; one generation passes away, another appears." He who acts the part of a king, takes not the purple with him. O villa, O house, tell me, how many masters hast thou had? Ah, when the comedy is over, the king is no longer king; the master ceases to be master. You at present are in the possession of such a villa, such a palace; but death will come, and they will pass to other masters.

The affliction of an hour maketh one forget great delights.—(Ecclus. xi., 29). The gloomy hour of death brings to an end and makes us forget all the grandeur, the nobility, the pomp of the world. Casimir, King of Poland, while he sat at a table with the nobles of his kingdom, died in the act of raising a cup to his lips,—and

the scene ended for him! In seven days after his election, the Emperor Celsus was killed,—and the scene closed for Celsus! Ladislaus, King of Poland, in his eighteenth year, while he was preparing for the reception of his bride, the daughter of the King of France, was suddenly seized with a violent pain, which soon deprived him of life. Couriers were instantly despatched to announce to her that the scene was over for Ladislaus, and that she might return to France. By meditating on the vanity of the world, Francis Borgia became a Saint. At the sight of the Empress Isabella, who had died in the midst of worldly grandeur and in the flower of youth, he, as has been already said, resolved to give himself entirely to God. "Thus, then," he said, "end the grandeurs and crowns of this world! I will henceforth serve a Master Who can never die!"

Ah, my God, I do not wish that the devil have any longer dominion over my soul; I wish that Thou alone be the Lord and Master of it. I will renounce all things in order to acquire Thy grace. I esteem it more than a thousand thrones and a thousand kingdoms. And whom shall I love but Thee, Who art infinitely amiable, an infinite Good, infinite Beauty, Bounty, and Love?

II.

Let us endeavour to live in such a manner that what was said to the fool in the Gospel may not be said to us at the hour of death: *Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee: and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?*—(Luke xii., 20). Hence the Redeemer adds: *So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*—(Luke xii., 21). Again Christ tells you to acquire the riches, not of the world, but of God;—of virtues and merits, which are goods that will remain with you for eternity in Heaven. *Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor the moth doth consume.*—(Matt. vi., 20). Let us, then, labour to acquire the great treasure of Divine love. "What has the rich man if he has not charity?" asks St. Augustine, "and what does the poor

man need, if he has charity?" If a man had all the riches in the world, and has not God, he is the poorest of men. But the poor man who possesses God, possesses all things. And who are they that possess God? *He*, says St. John, *that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him.*—(1 Jo. iv., 16).

Hitherto, O Lord God, I have left Thee for creatures: this is and always shall be to me a source of sorrow piercing my heart with grief for having offended Thee Who hast loved me with so much tenderness. But since Thou hast favoured me with so many graces, I can no longer bear to see myself without Thy love. O my Love, take possession of my whole will, and of all that I possess, and do with me what Thou pleasest. If I have hitherto been impatient under adversity, I ask pardon. O my Lord, I will never complain of Thy arrangements; I know that they are all holy, all for my welfare. Treat me, O my God, as Thou willest; I promise to be always content, always thankful to Thee. Make me love Thee, and I ask no more. What goods, what honours, what world can I love? O God! O God! I wish only for God! Happy thee, O Mary, who loved nothing in the world but God. Obtain for me the grace to imitate thee, at least during the remainder of my life. In thee I trust.

Spiritual Reading.

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

I.—THE PRACTICE OF HUMILITY.

No one can please God without being humble, for God cannot bear the proud. He has promised to hear those who pray to Him; but if a proud man prays to Him, the Lord hears him not. To the humble, on the contrary, He dispenses His graces: *God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble.*—(James iv., 6). Humility is of two kinds: humility of the *intellect*, and humility of

the *will* or of the *heart*. The former consists in the conviction we have of our own wretchedness,—that we can neither know nor do anything but what is evil. All that we have and do that is good comes from God.

With regard to the practice of humility of the *intellect* : First, we must put no confidence in our own strength, nor in our own resolutions ; but we must be always diffident and tremble for ourselves : *With fear and trembling work out your salvation.*—(Phil. ii., 12). St. Philip Neri said : " He who fears not is sure to fall."

Secondly, we must not glory in what belongs to us, such as our natural abilities, our good actions. our birth, our relatives, and the like. It is therefore well never to speak of our actions, except to confess where we have been wrong. It is better still not to speak of ourselves at all, either in praise or blame ; because, even when we blame ourselves, it is often an occasion of vain-glory, by making us think that we shall be praised, or at least pass as humble, and thus humility becomes pride.

Thirdly, let us not be angry with ourselves after a fault. That would not be humility, but pride ; and even a device of the devil to take away our confidence, and make us turn from a good life. When we see that we have fallen, we should say with St. Catherine of Genoa : " *Lord, behold these are the fruits of my own garden!*" Then let us humble ourselves, and rise immediately from our fault by an act of love and contrition, resolving not to fall again, and trusting in the help of God. And if we do unhappily fall again, we must rise and resolve again.

Fourthly, when we see others fall, we are not to be astonished : but rather let us compassionate them, thanking God the same has not happened to ourselves, and praying Him to keep His hand over us ; otherwise the Lord will punish us by permitting us to fall into the same sins, and perhaps worse.

Fifthly, we must always consider ourselves the greatest sinners in the world ; even when we know that others have sinned more than we ; because *our* sins having been committed after we had received so many lights and graces, will be more displeasing to God than the faults of

others, though perhaps more numerous than ours. St. Teresa says that we must not think we have made any progress in the Way of Perfection until we esteem ourselves worse than every one else, and desire to be considered the last of all.

Humility of the *will* or *heart* consists in being pleased when we are despised by others. Any one who has deserved hell, deserves to be trodden under foot by devils forever. Jesus Christ desires that we should learn of Him to be meek and humble of heart: *Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart.*—(Matt. xi., 29). Many are humble in word, but not in heart. They say: "I am worse than all: I deserve a thousand hells." But when anyone reproves them, or says a word that displeases them, they immediately take umbrage. They are like the hedgehogs, which put out their bristles as soon as they are touched. But how is this—you say you are worse than all, and yet you cannot bear a word? "He who is truly humble," says St. Bernard, "esteems himself good for nothing, and desires to be so regarded by others as well."

In the first place, then, if you wish to be truly humble, when you receive an admonition, receive it in good part, and thank the person who admonishes you. St. Chrysostom says: "When the just man is corrected, he is sorry for the error he has committed; but the proud man is sorry that the error should be known." The Saints, when they are accused, even wrongfully, do not justify themselves, except when it is necessary to defend themselves in order to avoid giving scandal: otherwise they are silent, and offer all to God.

In the second place, when you receive an affront, suffer it patiently, and increase in love towards the person who has ill-treated you. This is the touchstone that tests whether a person is humble and holy. If he resents an injury, even though he may work miracles, you may say that he is an empty reed. Father Balthazar Alvarez said that the time of humiliation is the time to gain treasures of merits. You will gain more by peaceably suffering some contempt, than you could by fasting ten days on bread and water. Humiliations we inflict on ourselves

are good; but those we accept from the hands of others are worth much more, because in these there is less of self and more of God; therefore, when we know how to bear them the merit is greater. But what can a Christian pretend to do if he cannot bear to be despised for the sake of God? How much contempt did not Jesus Christ suffer for us! Buffetings, derision, scourging, and spitting in His face! Ah! if we loved Jesus Christ, not only should we not show resentment for injuries, but rather rejoice at seeing ourselves despised as Jesus Christ was despised.

Evening Meditation.

TO PERSEVERE WE MUST CONQUER THE FLESH.

I.

St. Bernardine says that the most celebrated of all counsels, and the one which is, as it were, the very foundation of Religion, is to flee the occasions of sin. Being compelled by Exorcisms, the devil once confessed that of all sermons, that which displeased him most was the sermon *on avoiding the occasions of sin*: and justly so, for the devil laughs at all the resolutions and promises of penitent sinners who remain in the occasion of sin. The occasion of sins of the flesh, in particular, is like a veil placed before the eyes which prevents the soul from seeing either its resolutions, or the lights received from God, or the truths of eternity. In a word, it makes it forget everything, and almost blinds it. The neglect of avoiding the occasions of sin was the cause of the fall of our first parents. God had forbidden them even to touch the forbidden fruit. *God commanded us*, said Eve, *that we should not eat, and that we should not touch it.* —(Gen. iii., 3). But through want of caution she *saw*, *took*, and *ate it*. She first began to look at the apple, she afterwards took it in her hand, and then ate it. He

who voluntarily exposes himself to danger, will perish in it. *He that loveth danger shall perish in it.* —(Ecclus. iii., 27). St. Peter tells us that the devil *goeth about seeking whom he may devour.*—(1 Peter v., 8). And what, says St. Cyprian, does he do in order to enter again into the soul from which he has been expelled? He seeks an occasion of sin. If the soul permits him to bring it again into the occasion of sin, he will enter again and devour it. The Abbot Guerric says that Lazarus came forth from the grave bound hand and foot, and after rising in this state he died again. He means to say, that miserable is the man who rises from sin bound by the occasion of sin. Though he should rise, he will surely fall again. He, then, who wishes to be saved must forsake not only all *sin*, but the *occasions of sin*—that is, the companions, the house, the connections which lead to sin.

But you will say: I have changed my life, and now I have no bad motive, nor even a temptation in the society of such a person. It is related that in Mauritania there are bears that go in search of monkeys. As soon as they see a bear, the monkeys save themselves by climbing the trees: but what does the bear do? He stretches himself, as if dead, under the tree; and when the monkeys descend, he springs up, seizes, and devours them. It is thus the devil acts: he makes the temptations appear as dead; and when the soul exposes itself to the occasions of sin, he excites the temptation which devours it. Oh! how many miserable souls, that practised Mental Prayer and frequent Communion, and might be called Saints, have, by putting themselves into dangerous occasions, become the prey of hell! It is related in Ecclesiastical history, that a holy matron, who devoted herself to the pious work of burying the Martyrs, found one of them alive. She brought him to her house: he recovered. What happened? By the proximate occasion, these two Saints, as they might be called, first lost the grace of God, and afterwards lost the Faith.

My dear Redeemer, I thank Thee for the light which Thou now givest me, and for the means of salvation Thou makest known to me. I promise to endeavour to perse-

vere in the practice of them. I see that Thou wishest my salvation; and I wish to be saved principally to please Thy Heart, which so ardently desires my salvation. O my God, I will no longer resist the love Thou entertainest for me. This love has made Thee bear with me so patiently when I offended Thee. Thou callest me to Thy love, and I desire only to love Thee. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness: I love Thee, O infinite Good.

II.

The Lord commanded Isaias to proclaim that *all flesh is grass.*—(Is. xl., 6). Is it possible, asks St. John Chrysostom, for hay not to burn when it is thrown into the fire? And St. Cyprian says that it is impossible to stand in the midst of the flames and not be burned. According to the Prophet Isaias, our strength is like that of tow cast into the fire. *And your strength shall be as the ashes of tow.*—(Is. i., 31). And Solomon says: *Can a man walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?* (Prov. vi., 27). Thus it is likewise folly to expose ourselves to the occasion of sin, and to expect not to fall. It is necessary then to fly from sin as from the face of a serpent. *Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent.* —(Ecclus. xxi., 2). We ought not only to avoid the bite or contact of a serpent, but should also keep from approaching it. But you will say: My interest requires that I should frequent such a house, or that I should keep up a certain friendship. But if you see that such a house is for you a way to hell, there is no remedy; you must forsake it if you wish to save your soul. *Her house is the way to hell.*—(Prov. vii., 27). The Lord tells you that if your right eye is a cause of damnation to you, you must *pluck it out and cast it from you.*—(Matt. v., 29). Mark the words: you must *cast it*, not *beside* you, but *from* you—that is, you must take away every occasion of sin. St. Francis of Assisi says, that the devil tempts spiritual souls who have given themselves to God, in a way different from that in which he tempts the wicked. In the beginning he does not seek to bind them with a chain; he is content to hold them by a single hair:

he then binds them with a slender thread; afterwards with a cord; then with a chain; and thus drags them to sin. And therefore he who wishes to be free from the danger of perdition must from the beginning break all these hairs; he must avoid all occasions of sins; he must give up these salutations, presents, letters, and the like. And for those who have contracted a habit of committing sins against purity, it will not be enough to avoid *proximate occasions*: unless they fly even from *remote occasions*, they will relapse.

He who sincerely wishes to be saved, must often repeat with the Saints: *Let all be lost, provided God is not lost*, so as continually to strengthen and renew his resolution of never again renouncing the friendship of God.

Ah! I entreat Thee, O my God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, not to permit me to be ever again ungrateful to Thee, and, either to make me cease to be ungrateful to Thee, or to make me cease to live. Lord, Thou hast already begun the work; bring it to perfection. *Confirm, O God, what thou hast wrought in us.*—(Ps. lxvii., 29). Give me light, give me strength, give me love. O Mary, thou who art the treasurer of graces, assist me: accept me for thy servant and pray to Jesus for me. Through the merits of Jesus Christ, first, and then through thy prayers, I hope for salvation.

Thursday Sixth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

(For the Twenty-Fifth of February).

"*A WORM AND NO MAN.*"

Did not our Holy Faith assure us of it, who could ever believe that a God, for the love of such a worm as man is, should Himself become a worm like man? *I am a worm*

and no man.—(Ps. xxi., 7). And what return have you hitherto made to God for the love your God has borne you?

I.

Yes, this is of Faith: *And the word was made flesh.*—(Jo. i., 14). *He hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.*—(Apoc. i., 5). The Holy Church declares herself to be filled with fear at the contemplation of the work of Redemption: *I considered thy works, and was afraid.* And this the Prophet had said of old: *O Lord, I have heard thy hearing, and was afraid. . . . Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people; for salvation with thy Christ.*—(Hab. iii., 2, 13).

Hence St. Thomas terms the Mystery of the Incarnation the miracle of miracles; a miracle above all comprehension in which God showed how mighty was His love towards men by which God became Man, the Creator a creature, the Lord a servant, the impassible One subject to sufferings and to death: *He hath showed might in his arm.*—(Luke i., 51). We are told that St. Peter of Alcantara hearing those words of the Gospel sung on Christmas night—*In the beginning was the Word*—and reflecting on this Mystery, became so inflamed with Divine love that, in a state of ecstasy, he was borne a considerable space through the air to the foot of the Blessed Sacrament. And St. Augustine says that his soul could feast forever on the contemplation of the exalted goodness of God manifested to us in the work of human Redemption. It was for this reason and on account of his fervent devotion to this Mystery, God sent this Saint to inscribe on the heart of St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi the words: *And the Word was made flesh.*

So great, then, my Jesus, was the desire Thou hadst to be loved by us that all through Thy life Thou didst only desire to suffer and die for us, and thus put us under the necessity of loving Thee at least out of gratitude for so much love. And dost Thou so thirst for our love? How is it, then, we so little desire Thine? Alas, hitherto I

have been foolish, for I have not only not desired Thy love but I have brought Thy hatred upon me. My Redeemer, I know the evil I have done. I detest it and am sorry from the bottom of my heart. Help me, Jesus, my Love!

II.

Whosoever loves, has no other end in loving but to be loved in return. God, then, having so dearly loved us, seeks nothing from us, as St. Bernard remarks, but our love. Wherefore, he goes on to say: "He has made known His love that He may experience thine." O man, whoever thou art, thou hast witnessed the love which God has borne thee in becoming Man, in suffering and dying for thee; how long shall it be before God will know by experience, and by thy deeds the love thou bearest Him? Ah! truly every man at the sight of a God clothed in flesh, and choosing to lead a life of such hardship, and suffer a death of such ignominy, ought to be enkindled with love towards so loving a God. *Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens and wouldst come down: the mountains would melt away at thy presence, . . . the waters would burn with fire.*—(Is. lxiv., 1—2). Oh that Thou wouldst deign, my God, to leave the Heavens, and descend here and become Man amongst us! Ah, *the mountains would melt away!* On beholding Thee as one of themselves, men would surmount all obstacles, all difficulties in observing Thy laws and counsels would melt away! *The waters would burn with fire!* Thou wouldst enkindle such a furnace in the human heart that even the most frozen souls would catch the flame of Thy blessed love! And, in fact, since the Incarnation of the Son of God, O how brilliantly has the fire of Divine love shone in many loving souls! And it may be indeed asserted, without fear of contradiction, God has been more loved in one Century since the coming of Jesus Christ than in the entire forty preceding Centuries. How many youths, how many of the nobly born, and how many monarchs, have left wealth, honours, and their very kingdoms, to seek the desert or the cloister, that

there, hidden in poverty and seclusion, they might the more unreservedly give themselves to the love of their Saviour! How many Martyrs have gone to torments and to death rejoicing and making merry! How many tender young virgins have refused the proffered hand of the great ones of this world, in order to go and die for Jesus Christ, and so repay in some measure the affection of a God Who stooped down to become incarnate and to die for love of them!

Have all men sought thus to correspond with this immense love of Jesus Christ? Alas, my God, the greater number have repaid Thee with nothing but ingratitude! And you also, tell me, what return have you hitherto made for the love your God has borne you? Have you always shown yourself thankful? Have you ever seriously reflected what those words mean: A God made Man! A God to die for thee!

O my Jesus, forget the offences that I have committed against Thee. Thou art my Love, Thou art my Hope! Thou knowest how weak I am. Help me, my Jesus. O Mary, great Mother of God, succour me also with thy prayers.

Spiritual Reading.

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

II.—THE PRACTICE OF MORTIFICATION.

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me.—(St. Matt. xvi., 24).

This is all that anyone who wishes to be a follower of Jesus Christ has to do. The denying of oneself is the mortification of self-love. Do we wish to be saved? We must, then, conquer all to make sure of all. How miserable is the soul that allows itself to be guided by self-love!

Mortification is of two kinds, interior and exterior. By *interior mortification* we have to study to conquer our passions, and especially our most predominant one. A person who does not overcome his predominant passion is in great danger of being lost. Whereas he who has overcome that, will easily conquer all the others. Some, however, allow one vice to predominate in them, and think that they are good because they do not see in themselves vices which others have. "But what does it matter?" says St. Cyril: "one leak is enough to sink the ship." Nor will it suffice to say: "I cannot abstain from this vice,"—a resolute will conquers all, that is, of course, with the assistance of God Who will never fail us.

Exterior mortification has to do with conquering the sensual appetites. Worldly people call the Saints cruel when they deny their bodies all satisfaction of the senses and chastise them with hair-shirts, disciplines, and other penances. "But," says St. Bernard, "they are in reality much more cruel who condemn themselves to burn for ever in hell-fire for the sake of the short and miserable pleasures of this life." Others say that all forbidden pleasures should be denied to the body; but they despise external mortifications, saying, that interior mortification is what is required; that is, the mortification of the will. Yes, it is principally necessary to mortify the will, but the mortification of the flesh is also necessary; because when the flesh is not mortified, obedience to God's laws is difficult. St. John of the Cross said that any one who taught that external mortification was not necessary, ought not to be believed, even though he worked miracles. But let us come to the practice of it.

In the first place, *the eyes must be mortified.* The first arrows which wound the soul, and often kill it, enter through the eyes. The eyes are, as it were, grappling-irons of hell, which drag souls, as if by main force, into sin. A certain Pagan philosopher voluntarily put out his eyes to free himself from impurity. It is not lawful for us to pluck out our eyes, but we ought to render them blind by means of mortification; otherwise we shall find it difficult to keep ourselves chaste. St. Francis de Sales said: "You must close the gates if you do not wish the

enemy to enter into the citadel." We must abstain from looking at any object that may give occasion to temptation. St. Aloysius Gonzaga did not dare to raise his eyes to look even at his own mother. And when by chance our eyes light on some dangerous object, let us take care not to fix them on it. "It is not so much the mere seeing," says St. Francis de Sales, "but the inspecting and continuing to look, that is the cause of ruin." Let us then be very careful in mortifying our eyes; because many are now in hell on account of sins committed with the eyes.

In the second place, *we must mortify our tongue*, by abstaining from words of detraction, of abuse, or of obscenity. An impure word spoken in conversation, even in jest, may prove a scandal to others, and be the cause and source of a thousand sins. And it should be observed, that often a word of double meaning, said in a witty way, does more harm than a word openly impure.

In the third place, *we must mortify the taste*. St. Andrew Avellino said that in order to commence a good Christian life, a man must begin by the mortification of his palate. And St. Francis de Sales said: "We must eat to live, not live to eat." Many seem to live only to eat, and thus they destroy the health both of their soul and body. For the most part costiveness, diarrhœa, and other illnesses are caused by gluttony. But the worst is, that intemperance in eating and drinking is often the cause of incontinence. Cassian writes that it is impossible for a man who is satiated with food and heating drinks—as wine, brandy, and the like, not to feel many impure temptations. "But how is this?" says some one; "must I eat no more?" Yes, my good friend, we must eat to preserve our life, but like rational beings, not as brutes. Especially if you desire to be free from impure temptations, abstain from eating overmuch meat, and from overmuch wine. The Scripture says: *Give not wine to kings.*—(Prov. xxxi., 4). By a king is meant one who brings his flesh under the dominion of reason. Much wine makes us lose our reason, and involves not only the vice of intemperance which is certainly a mortal sin, but also that of impurity. Do not

complain of sometimes having to fast or abstain, especially on a Saturday, in honour of the Most Holy Mary. Many fast on bread and water. This you can at least do on the Vigils of the seven principal Feasts of Our Lady. I pray you to observe at least the Fasts of obligation. Some go beyond fifteen or twenty ounces at collation, and say: "It is alright if one is not satisfied." No, it is not alright. The most that can be taken on the evenings of fast days of obligation is eight ounces; and even that has grown up by custom; for in olden times food could be taken only once a day.

In the fourth place, *we must mortify our hearing and our touch*: the hearing, by avoiding listening to immodest and scandalous conversations; the touch, by using all possible caution, as well in regard to others as in regard to ourselves. Some say it is nothing, that they only do it in jest; but who, I ask, would play with fire?

Evening Meditation.

THE GREAT LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST FOR US.

I.

And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.—(Luke iii., 6).

The Saviour of the world Whom the Prophet Isaias says men were one day to see on this earth—*and all flesh shall see the salvation of God*—has already come. We have not only seen Him conversing among men, but we have also seen Him suffering and dying for the love of us. Let us consider this great love which Jesus Christ has shown us.

"Christ," says St. Augustine, "came on earth that men might know how much God loves them." He has come, and to show the immense love which this God bears us, He has given Himself entirely to us, by abandoning Himself to all the pains of this life, and afterwards

to the scourges, the thorns, and all the sorrows and insults of His Passion, and offering Himself to die abandoned by all, on the infamous tree of the Cross. *Who hath loved us and hath delivered himself for us.*—(Eph. v., 2).

Jesus Christ could save us without dying on the Cross, and without suffering. One drop of His Blood would be sufficient for our redemption. Even a prayer offered to His Eternal Father would be sufficient; because, on account of His Divinity, His prayer would be of infinite value, and would therefore be sufficient for the salvation of the world and of a thousand worlds. "But," says an ancient author, "what was sufficient for redemption was not sufficient for love." To show how much He loved us, He wished to shed not only a part of His Blood, but the whole of it, by dint of torments. This may be inferred from the words which He used on the night before His death : *This is my blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for many.*—(Matt. xxvi., 28). The words *shall be shed* show that, in His Passion, the Blood of Jesus Christ was poured forth even to the last drop. Hence, when after death His side was opened with a spear, Blood and water came forth. What then flowed out was all that remained of His Blood. Jesus Christ, then, though He could save us without suffering, wished to embrace a life of continual pain, and to suffer the cruel and ignominious death of the Cross. *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*—(Phil. ii., 8).

O Jesus, let Thy Blood flow upon me as upon the good Thief to wash me from my sins. May it inflame me with Thy holy love and make me all Thine own ! I love Thee, O my Jesus, and I wish that I could die crucified for Thee as Thou didst die crucified for me.

II.

Greater love than this no man hath that a man lay down his life for his friends.—(Jo. xv., 13). To show His love for us, what more could the Son of God do than die for us ? What more can one man do for another than

give his life for him? *Greater love than this no man hath.* Tell me, if one of your servants, if the vilest man on this earth, had done for you what Jesus Christ has done in dying of pain on a Cross, could you remember his love for you and not love him?

St. Francis of Assisi appeared to be unable to think of anything save the Passion of Jesus Christ; and thinking on it, he continually shed tears, so that by his constant weeping he became nearly blind. Being found one day weeping and groaning at the foot of the Crucifix, he was asked the cause of his tears and lamentations. He replied: "I weep over the sorrows and ignominies of my Lord. And what makes me weep still more is, that the men for whom He has suffered so much live in forgetfulness of Him."

O Christian, should a doubt ever enter your mind that Jesus Christ loves you, raise your eyes and look at Him hanging on the Cross. Ah! the Cross to which He is nailed, the internal and external sorrows which He endures, and the cruel death which He suffers for you, are, says St. Thomas of Villanova, convincing proofs of the love which He bears you. Do you not, says St. Bernard, hear that Cross and those Wounds crying out to make you feel that He truly loves you?

Ah, my Jesus, yes, Thou hast loved me even unto dying for me and I, too, wish to love Thee even unto dying for Thee! O my Lord, revenge Thyself upon me for my offences, but let it be the revenge of pity and of love!

Friday—Sixth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

"O LOVE, O LOVE, O LOVE!"

St. Paul says that when the Gentiles heard it preached that Jesus was crucified for the love of men they considered it such foolishness that they could not believe it. Yes, for it seemed only folly that a God should die for men. Hence the Saints were struck dumb with amazement at the consideration of the love of Jesus Christ. At the sight of the crucifix St. Francis de Paul could only exclaim : O Love ! O Love ! O Love !

I.

St. Paul says that the love Jesus has shown us in condescending to suffer so much for our salvation should excite us more powerfully to love Him than the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the painful journey to Calvary, the agony of three hours on the Cross, the buffets, the spitting in His face, and all the other injuries which the Saviour endured. According to the Apostle, the love which Jesus has shown us not only obliges, but in a certain manner forces and constrains us, to love a God Who has loved us so much. *For the charity of Christ presseth us.*—(2 Cor. v., 14). On this text St. Francis de Sales writes : " We know that Jesus, the true God, has loved us so as to suffer death, and even the death of the Cross for our salvation. Does not such love put our hearts as it were under a press, to force from them love by a violence which is all the stronger in proportion as it is more amiable ?"

So great was the love which inflamed the enamoured Heart of Jesus, that He not only wished to die for our

redemption, but during His whole life He sighed ardently for the day on which He should suffer death for the love of us. Hence, during His life Jesus used to say : *I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?*—(Luke xii., 50). In My Passion I am to be baptized with the baptism of My own Blood to wash away the sins of men. *And how am I straitened!* How, says St. Ambrose, explaining this passage, am I straitened by the desire of the speedy arrival of the day of my death? Hence, on the night before His Passion, He said : *With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you before I suffer.*—(Luke xxii., 15).

O infinite Love, worthy of infinite love, when shall I love Thee, my Jesus, as Thou hast loved me! Enlighten me, inflame me, detach me from the earth, and permit me no longer to resist so many enticements of Thy love.

II.

We have, says St. Laurence Justinian, seen wisdom become foolish through excess of love. We have seen the Son of God become as it were a fool, through the excessive love He bore to men. Such, too, was the language of the Gentiles when they heard the Apostles preaching that Jesus Christ suffered death for the love of men. *But we*, says St. Paul, *preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumblingblock, unto the Gentiles foolishness.*—(1 Cor. i., 23). Who, they exclaimed, can believe that a God, most happy in Himself, and Who stands in need of no one, should take human flesh and die for the love of men who are His creatures? This would be to believe that a God became foolish for the love of men. "It appears folly," says St. Gregory, "that the Author of Life should die for men." But whatever infidels may say or think, it is of Faith that the Son of God has shed all His Blood for the love of us, to wash away the sins of our souls. *Who hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood.*—(Apoc. i., 5). Hence the Saints were struck dumb with astonishment at

the consideration of the love of Jesus Christ. At the sight of the Crucifix, St. Francis de Paul could only exclaim : O love ! O love ! O love !

O my Jesus, if Thou art, as it were, mad for the love of me, how is it that I do not become mad for the love of a God ! When I see Thee crucified and dead for me, how is it that I can think of any other than Thee ! Mary, my Mother, entreat Jesus for me that He may grant me His holy love.

Spiritual Reading.

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

III.—CHARITY TOWARDS THE NEIGHBOUR.

He who loves God loves his neighbour also : but he who loves not his neighbour loves not God, for the Divine Precept is : *that he who loveth God love also his brother.* —(1 Jo. iv., 21). We must also love our neighbour in heart as well as in deed. And how much are we to love him ? Here is the rule : *Love the Lord thy God with thy whole soul . . . and thy neighbour as thyself.* —(Luke x., 27). We must, then, love God above all things, and more than ourselves ; and our neighbour as ourselves. So that, as we desire our own good, and rejoice in it, and, on the contrary, are sorry for any evil that may happen to us ; so also we must desire our neighbour's good, and rejoice when he obtains it ; and, on the other hand, we must be sorry for his misfortune. So, again, without good grounds we must neither judge nor suspect evil of our neighbour. And this is what constitutes *interior charity.*

External charity regards our words and actions towards the neighbour. As to words,—first, we must abstain from the least shadow of detraction. A detractor is hateful to God and man. But he who speaks well of every one is beloved by God and men ; and when the

fault cannot be excused, we must at least excuse the intention. Secondly, let us be careful not to repeat to any one the evil that has been said of him by another; because sometimes long enmities and revenge arise from such things. The Scripture says that he who sows discord is hated by God. Thirdly, we must take care not to wound our neighbour, by saying, even in jest, any thing that may hurt him. Would *you* like to be laughed at in the same way as you laugh at your neighbour? Fourthly, let us avoid disputes. Sometimes on account of a mere trifle quarrels are begun, which end in abuse and rancour. We have also to guard against the spirit of contradiction which some indulge by gratuitously setting themselves to contradict everything. On such occasions give your opinion and then be quiet. Fifthly, let us speak gently to all, even to our inferiors; therefore let us not make use of imprecations or abuse. And when our neighbour is angry with us, and somewhat abusive, let us answer meekly and the quarrel will be at an end: *A mild answer breaketh wrath.*—(Prov. xv., 1). And when annoyed by our neighbour, we must be careful not to speak because our passion will then make us go too far: it will make us exaggerate, and afterwards we shall certainly be sorry for it. St. Francis of Sales said: "I was never angry in my life that I did not repent of it shortly afterwards." The rule is to be silent as long as we feel ourselves disturbed. And when our neighbour continues to be irritated, let us reserve the correction till another time, even though it should be necessary; because at the moment our words would not convince or do any good.

With regard also to charity in our actions towards our neighbour. First, it is practised by aiding him as best we may. Let us remember what the Scripture says: *For alms deliver from all sin and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness.*—(Job iv., 11). Almsgiving, then, saves us from sin and from hell. By alms is understood any assistance it is in our power to render our neighbour. The kind of almsgiving which is the most meritorious is, to help the soul of our neighbour, by correcting him gently and opportunely whenever we can.

And let us not say with some : " What does it matter to me?" It does matter to one who is a Christian. He who loves God wishes to see Him loved by all.

Secondly, we must show charity towards the sick who are in greater need of help than others. If they are poor, let us take them some little present. At least let us go and wait on them and comfort them, even though they should not thank us for it. The Lord will reward us for it.

Thirdly, we must above all show charity to our enemies. Some are all kindness with their friends; but Jesus Christ says : *Do good to those that hate you.* —(Matt. v., 44). By this you may know that a man is a true Christian, if he seeks to do good to those who wish him evil. And if we can do nothing else for those who persecute us, let us at least pray that God will prosper them, according as Jesus commands us : *Pray for them that persecute you.* —(Matt. v., 44). This is the way the Saints revenged themselves. He who pardons anyone who has offended him, is sure of being pardoned by God, since God has given us the promise : *Forgive, and you shall be forgiven.* —(Luke vi., 37). Our Lord said one day to the Blessed Angela of Foligno, that the surest sign of your being loved by God, is when you love the person who has offended you.

Fourthly, let us also be charitable to our neighbours who are dead, that is, to the Holy Souls in Purgatory. St. Thomas says, that if we are bound to help our neighbours who are alive, we are also bound to remember them when dead. Those holy prisoners are suffering pains which exceed all the suffering of this life, and, nevertheless, are in the greatest necessity, since they cannot possibly help themselves. A Cistercian monk once said to the sacristan of his monastery : " Help me, brother, by your prayers, when I can no longer help myself." Let us, then, endeavour to succour these Holy Souls either by having Masses said for them, or by hearing Masses for them, by giving alms, or at least by praying and applying indulgences on their behalf. They will show themselves grateful by obtaining great graces for

us, not only when they reach Heaven, if they get there sooner through our prayers, but also while still in Purgatory.

Evening Meditation.

OUR OBLIGATIONS TO LOVE JESUS CHRIST.

I.

He who loves, wishes to be loved. "When," says St. Bernard, "God loves, He desires nothing else than to be loved." The Redeemer said: *I am come to cast fire on the earth and what will I but that it be kindled?*—(Luke xii., 49). God wishes nothing else from us than to be loved. Hence the holy Church prays in the following words: "We beseech Thee, O Lord, that Thy spirit may inflame us with that fire Jesus Christ cast upon the earth, and which He ardently wished to be kindled."

Ah, what have not the Saints, inflamed with this fire, accomplished! They have abandoned all things—delights, honours, the purple and the sceptre—that they might burn with this holy fire. But you will ask what are you to do, that you too may be inflamed with the love of Jesus Christ. Imitate David: *In my meditation a fire shall flame out.*—(Ps. xxxviii., 4). Meditation is the blessed furnace in which the holy fire of Divine love is kindled. Make Mental Prayer every day; meditate on the Passion of Jesus Christ, and doubt not but you too shall burn with this blessed flame.

St. Paul says, that Jesus Christ died for us to make Himself the Master of the hearts of all. *To this end Christ died and rose again, that he might be lord both of the dead and of the living.*—(Rom. xiv., 9). He wished, says the Apostle, to give His life for all men, that not even one should live any longer to himself, but that all might live only to that God Who condescended to die for them. *And Christ died for all, that they also who live may not now live to themselves, but unto him who died for them.*—(2 Cor. v., 15).

Ah ! to correspond to the love of this God, it would be necessary that another God should die for Him, as Jesus Christ died for us. O ingratitude of men ! A God has condescended to give His life for their salvation, and they will not even think of what He has done for them ! If each of you thought frequently on the sufferings of the Redeemer, and on the love which He has shown to us in His Passion, how could you but love Him with your whole hearts ? To him who with a lively Faith sees the Son of God suspended by three nails on an infamous gibbet, every wound of Jesus speaks and says : *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.* Love, O man, thy Lord and thy God Who has loved thee so intensely. Who can resist such tender invitations ? " The Wounds of Jesus Christ," says St. Bonaventure, " wound the hardest hearts, and inflame frozen souls."

II.

Oh, si scires mysterium crucis ! Oh, if thou didst know the mystery of the Cross ! said St. Andrew the Apostle to the tyrant by whom he was tempted to deny Jesus Christ. O tyrant, if you knew the love which your Saviour has shown you by dying on the Cross for your salvation, instead of tempting me, you would abandon all the goods of this earth to give yourself to the love of Jesus Christ.

Henceforth meditate every day on the Passion of Jesus Christ, for at least a quarter of an hour. Let each one procure a Crucifix, and keep it in his room, and from time to time glance at it, saying : " Ah, my Jesus, Thou hast died for me, and yet I do not love Thee !"

Had a person suffered for a friend injuries, buffets, and prisons, he would be greatly pleased to find that the friend remembered and spoke of him with gratitude. But he would be greatly displeased if the friend for whom these trials had been borne, were unwilling to think of or hear of his sufferings. Thus frequent Meditation on His Passion is very pleasing to our Redeemer; but the neglect of it greatly provokes His displeasure.

Oh, how great will be the consolation we shall receive in our last moments from the sorrows and death of Jesus Christ, if, during life, we shall have frequently meditated on them with love! Let us not wait till others, at the hour of death, place in our hands the Crucifix; let us not wait till they remind us of all that Jesus Christ suffered for us. Let us during life embrace Jesus Christ crucified and keep ourselves always united to Him, that we may live and die with Him. He who practises devotion to the Passion of our Lord, cannot but be devoted to the sorrows of Mary, the remembrance of which will be to us a source of great consolation at the hour of death.

Oh, how profitable and sweet to meditate on Jesus on the Cross! How happy the death of him who dies in the embraces of Jesus crucified, accepting death with cheerfulness for the love of that God Who has died for love of us!

Saturday—Sixth Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

CONFIDENCE IN MARY'S INTERCESSION.

HER DESIRE TO HELP US.

St. Bernard says that since the power to save us cannot be wanting to Mary as she is the Mother of God, so neither can the desire to help us be wanting because she is our Mother. O Mother of God, and my Mother, Mary, in thee do I place all my confidence.

I.

Of what use, says St. Bonaventure, would Mary's power be to us if she did not care to help us? But, adds the Saint, let us hold for certain that as the Virgin Mary is the most powerful of all the Saints before God, so she is the most solicitous of all for our salvation. "And who, O Lady," says St. Germanus, "after thy Son, feels greater solicitude for us than thou dost? Who defends us so powerfully in our afflictions? Who labours so hard for the conversion of sinners? O Mary, thy protection is so great that we cannot comprehend it." St. Andrew Avellino used to call Mary "the agent of Paradise." For what does she do in Heaven? She prays continually for us and obtains for us all the graces that we ask. She said one day to St. Bridget: "I am called, and I truly am, the Mother of Mercy; for such the Mercy of God has has made me." And who but God in His Mercy, because He wishes to save all, has given us this great protectress? Miserable, and miserable for eternity, said the Blessed Virgin to St. Bridget, shall be the man who is damned, because when it was in his power in this life to invoke my intercession, he neglected to have recourse to me who am so compassionate to all.

Richard of St. Victor says that Mary is so full of mercy that when she sees our miseries she instantly assists us; she cannot behold a soul in want without coming to its relief.

It was thus she acted when she lived on earth as we learn from what happened at the Marriage in Cana of Galilee. If, then, says St. Bonaventure, Mary's compassion for the afflicted was so great while she lived in this world, her pity for us is certainly far greater now that she reigns in Heaven where she has a better knowledge of our miseries and greater compassion for our afflictions.

O Lady, if thou pray for me I shall be saved, for thou dost obtain by thy prayers whatever thou wishest. Pray, then, for me, O great Mother of God, for thy Son hears thee and grants whatever thou askest. It is true

that I am unworthy of thy protection, but thou hast never abandoned a soul that had recourse to thee. O Mary, I consign my soul to thee. Thou hast to save it.

II.

Let us not neglect to have recourse in all our necessities to the Divine Mother who is ever prepared to succour all who invoke her intercession. We shall always find her hands full of mercies and graces. Richard of St. Victor says that Mary's heart is so full of compassion, that as soon as she perceives the wants of the miserable, she anticipates their supplications, and obtains relief for them before they ask it. Why, then, says St. Bernard, should we fear that when we have recourse to Mary she will not console us? She is not austere; she does not inspire terror; she is all sweetness and benignity to those who recommend themselves to her. And can she be otherwise than beneficent to those who ask her prayers, when she herself goes in search of the miserable to save them? Behold how she invites all, and encourages them to hope for all good if they have recourse to her: *In me is all hope of life and of virtue: come over to me all ye that desire me, and be filled with my fruits.*—(Ecclus. xxiv., 25). On this passage Pelbart says: "She calls all, the just and sinners." The devil, according to St. Peter, *goes about seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter v., 8), but this Divine Mother, says Bernardine da Bustis, goes about seeking whom she may save.

To obtain salvation through her intercession it is enough to ask the aid of her prayers. St. Bonaventure has written that Mary's desire for our welfare and salvation is so great, that she is offended not only with those who do her a positive injury, but also with those who do not ask favours from her. Hence the Saint used to say that when he looked at Mary he beheld Mercy itself stretching out her hands to raise him up from his miseries. For this great Lady knows not, and has never known, how to behold without compassion, or to leave without succour, a person who in his misery recommends himself to her. Mary's constant occupation in Heaven consists

in asking mercy for the miserable. St. Bridget once heard Jesus say to His holy Mother : " My Mother, ask what you wish from Me." And what was Mary's request? " I ask Mercy for the miserable." As if she said : My Son, since Thou hast made me Mother of Mercy and Advocate of the miserable, what else will I ask from Thee but Mercy for those who are in misery? And because poor sinners are the most miserable of all, she has her eyes always turned to them in order to assist them.

O Mary, my Mother, I cannot fear, seeing thy immense mercy and the very great desire of thy most sweet heart to help the most abandoned sinners. And who was ever lost who had recourse to thee? Therefore, I invoke thy aid, O my great advocate, my refuge, my hope, my Mother Mary! Into thy hands I entrust the cause of my eternal salvation. To thee I commit my soul. I implore thee, O Mary, for the love that thou bearest to Jesus, to preserve and increase in me more and more this sweet confidence in thy intercession. Amen.

Spiritual Reading.

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

IV.—DEVOTION TOWARDS THE GREAT MOTHER OF GOD.

As regards this devotion, I hope the reader is fully persuaded that in order to insure eternal salvation, it is most important to be devout to the great Mother of God. And if he should wish to be still more convinced of it, I would beg him to read the book I have written, *The Glories of Mary*. I shall here speak only of the practices to be observed, that you may obtain the protection of this sovereign Lady. First, every morning and evening, when you get up and before you go to bed, say three *Hail Marys*, adding this short prayer : *By thy pure and Immaculate Conception, O Mary, make my body pure*

and my soul holy! And put yourself beneath her mantle that she may keep you that day or that night from sin. And every time you hear the clock strike, say a *Hail Mary*. Do the same whenever you go in or out of the house, and when you pass by any statue or picture of the Blessed Virgin. So also when you begin and finish any of your occupations, such as study, work, eating, or sleeping, never omit to say a *Hail Mary*.

Secondly, say the *Rosary* every day, at least five decades, meditating on the Mysteries. Many devout people also say the Office of Our Lady. It would be well to say at any rate the Little Office of the Name of Mary, which is very short, and composed of five short psalms.

Thirdly, say an *Our Father* and *Hail Mary* every day to the ever-blessed Trinity in thanksgiving for the graces that have been bestowed upon Mary. The Blessed Virgin herself revealed to a person that this devotion was very pleasing to her.

Fourthly, fast on bread and water every Saturday in honour of Mary, or at least on the Vigils of her seven Feasts. At any rate fast in the ordinary way, or eat only of one dish, or abstain from something you like. In short, make use of some kind of mortification on Saturdays, and on the above-named Vigils, for the sake of this Queen, who (as St. Andrew of Crete says) repays these little things with great graces.

Fifthly, pay a *Visit* every day to some image of your Patroness, and ask her to give you holy perseverance and the love of Jesus Christ.

Sixthly, let no day pass without reading a little about Our Lady.

Seventhly, make the *Novenas* for the seven principal Feasts of Mary, and ask your confessor to tell you what devotions and mortifications you should practise during those nine days. Say at least nine *Hail Marys* and *Glory be to the Father*, and beg her each day of the Novena to give you some special grace of which you are in need.

Lastly, often recommend yourself to this Divine Mother during the day, and particularly in time of temptation, saying at such times, and often repeating with great affection: O Mary help me! Help me, O my Mother!

And if you love Mary, try to promote devotion to this great Mother of God among your relations, friends and servants.

Evening Meditation.

PRAYER.

I.—ITS POWER.

I.

Ask and it shall be given you . . . for every one that asketh receiveth.—(Luke xi., 9, 10).

In a thousand places in the Old and the New Testament, God promises to hear all who pray to Him. *Cry to me and I will hear thee.*—(Jer. xxxiii., 3). *Call upon me . . . and I will deliver thee.*—(Ps. xlix., 15). *If you ask anything in my name, that I will do.*—(Jo. xiv., 14). *You shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you.*—(Jo. xv., 7). Hence Theodoret has said that prayer is one, but can obtain all things. St. Bernard says that when we pray, the Lord will give either the grace we ask, or one that is more useful to us. The Prophet animates us to pray by assuring us that God is all mercy to those who invoke His aid. *Thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee.*—(Ps. lxxxv., 5). The words of St. James are still more encouraging. *If any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth abundantly to all men and upbraideth not.*—(James i., 5). This Apostle tells us that when we pray to the Lord, He opens His hands and gives us more than we ask. *He giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not.* He does not reproach us with the offences we have offered to Him; but, when we pray to Him, He appears to forget all the injuries we have done Him.

St. John Climacus used to say that prayer in a certain manner forces God to grant us whatsoever we ask of Him. "Prayer piously offers violence to God." But it

is, as Tertullian says, a violence which is pleasing to Him, and which He desires from us. Yes; for as St. Augustine says, God has a greater desire to give us His graces, than we have to receive them. The reason is, because God is of His own nature infinite Goodness. Hence He feels an infinite desire to impart His benefits to us. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi used to say that God feels as it were under an obligation to the soul that prays to Him; because by prayer it opens to Him the way by which He can satisfy His desire of dispensing His graces to us.

O Eternal God, I adore Thee and I thank Thee for all the benefits Thou hast bestowed upon me,—for having created me, for having redeemed me, through Jesus Christ, for having made me a Christian, for having waited for me when I was in sin, and for having so often pardoned me. Ah, my God, I should never have offended Thee, if in my temptations I had recourse to Thee.

II.

David says that the goodness of God, in instantly hearing all who pray to Him, proves that God was his true God. *In what day soever I shall call upon thee, behold, I know thou art my God.*—(Ps. lv., 10). Some, observes St. Bernard, complain that God fails them; but the Lord may far more justly complain that many fail Him when they neglect to ask His graces. Of this precisely the Redeemer appears to have complained one day to His disciples. *Hitherto you have not asked anything in my name: ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.*—(Jo. xvi., 24). As if He said: Do not complain of Me if you do not enjoy complete happiness; complain of yourselves for not having asked My graces. Ask Me for them henceforth, and you shall be satisfied.

There is no exercise more conducive to salvation than to pray always and say: Lord, assist me! *Incline unto my aid, O God.*—(Ps. lxix., 2). The Venerable Paul Segneri used to say that in his Meditations he was at first accustomed to spend his time in *pious affections;* but, having afterwards learned the great efficacy of prayer, he

endeavoured generally to employ himself in *petitions to God*. Let us always do the same. We have a God Who loves us to excess, and Who is solicitous for our salvation, and therefore He is ever ready to hear all who ask His graces. The earthly princes, says St. Chrysostom, give audience only to a few; but God gives audience to all who wish.

I thank Thee, O God, for the light by which Thou now makest me understand that my salvation consists in praying to Thee and in asking graces of Thee. Behold I entreat Thee in the Name of Jesus Christ, to give me a great sorrow for my sins, holy perseverance in Thy grace, a good death, Heaven, but above all, the great gift of Thy love and perfect resignation to Thy most holy will. I well know that I do not deserve these graces, but Thou has promised them to all who ask them of Thee through the merits of Jesus Christ. Through these merits I hope and ask for them. O Mary, thy prayers are always heard; pray for me.

Septuagesima Sunday

Morning Meditation.

"*HE SENT THEM INTO HIS VINEYARD.*"
—(Gospel of Sunday. Matt. x., 1—16).

The Lord's vines are our souls which He has given us to cultivate by good works that one day we may be admitted into eternal glory. Many live as if they were never to die, or as if they had not to give to God an account of their lives, as if there were no Heaven and no hell. They believe but they do not reflect. They take all possible care of worldly affairs, but attend not to the salvation of their souls. O my God, what shall my lot be? If I may be lost why do I not embrace such a life as may secure for me eternal life?

I.

St. Paul says: *We entreat you, brethren . . . that you do your own business.* (1 Thess. iv., 10). The greater number of people in the world are attentive to the business of this world. What diligence do they not employ to gain a law-suit or a good position! How many means are adopted—how many measures taken! They neither eat nor sleep. And what efforts do they make to save their souls? All blush at being told that they neglect their family affairs, and how few are ashamed to neglect the salvation of their souls!

Brethren, says St. Paul, *we entreat you that you do your own business;* that is, the business of your eternal salvation.

"The trifles of children," says St. Bernard, "are called trifles, but the *trifles* of men are called *business*," —and for these trifles many lose their souls. If in one worldly transaction you suffer a loss, you may repair it in another; but if you die in enmity with God, and lose your soul, how can you repair the loss? *What exchange shall a man give for his soul?*—(Matt. xvi., 26). To those who neglect the care of salvation, St. Eucherius says: "If thou dost not believe thy Creator how precious thou art, interrogate thy Redeemer." If, from being created by God to His own image, you do not comprehend the value of your soul, learn it from Jesus Christ Who has redeemed you with His own Blood. *You were not redeemed with corruptible things as gold or silver, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled.*—(1 Pet. i., 18).

God, therefore, sets a high value on your soul. Such is its value in the estimation of Satan, that, to become master of it, he sleeps not night or day, but is continually going about seeking to make it his own. Hence St. Augustine exclaims: "The enemy sleeps not, and dost thou sleep?" The enemy is always awake to injure you, and you slumber. Pope Benedict XII. being asked by a prince for a favour he could not conscientiously grant, said to the ambassador: Tell the prince that if I had two souls, I might be able to lose one of them to please him: but, since I have only one, I cannot consent to lose it. Thus he refused the favour the prince sought from him.

O God, what shall my lot be? Shall I be saved, or shall I be lost? I may be either saved or lost! And if I may be lost, why do I not embrace such a life as may secure for me life eternal? O Jesus, Thou didst die to save me; yet I have been lost as often as I have lost Thee, my sovereign Good! Suffer me not to lose Thee any more.

II.

Remember that, if you save your soul, your failure in every worldly transaction will be but of little consequence : for when you are saved, you shall enjoy complete happiness for all eternity. But if you lose your soul, what will it profit you to have enjoyed all the riches, honours and amusements of this world? For when you lose your soul, all is lost. *What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul.* —(Matt. xvi., 26). By this maxim St. Ignatius of Loyola drew many souls to God, and among them the soul of St. Francis Xavier who was then at Paris and devoted his attention to the acquirement of worldly goods. One day St. Ignatius said to him : " Francis, whom do you serve? You serve the world, a traitor that promises but does not perform. And if it should fulfil all its promises, how long do its goods last? Can they last longer than this life? And after death, what will they profit you if you shall not have saved your soul?" He then reminded Francis of the maxim of the Gospel : *What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?*

But one thing is necessary!—(Luke x., 42). It is not necessary to become rich on this earth to acquire honours and dignities; but it is necessary to save our souls; because unless we gain Heaven we shall be condemned to hell : there is no middle place : we must be either saved or damned. God has not created us for this earth; neither does He preserve our lives here on earth that we may become rich and enjoy amusements. *And the end life everlasting.*—(Rom. vi., 22). He has created us, and preserved us, that we may acquire eternal glory.

O Jesus, my Redeemer, cast me not away from Thy face as I have deserved! I am indeed a sinner; but I grieve from the bottom of my heart for having offended Thy infinite goodness. Hitherto I have despised Thee, but now I love Thee above all things. Henceforth Thou alone shalt be my only Good, my only Love. Have pity on a sinner who penitently casts himself at Thy feet, and desires to love Thee. If I have grievously offended

Thee, I now ardently desire to love Thee. What would have become of me, if Thou hadst called me out of life when I had lost Thy grace and favour? Since Thou, O Lord, hast shown so much mercy to me, grant me grace to become a Saint.

Spiritual Reading.

"*WHY STAND YE HERE ALL THE DAY IDLE?*" —(Gospel of Sunday).

St. Philip Neri used to say that "Heaven is not for sluggards," and that he who does not seek the salvation of his soul above all things is a fool. If on this earth there were two classes of people, one *mortal*, and the other *immortal*, and if the former saw the latter entirely devoted to the acquisition of earthly goods, would they not exclaim: O fools that you are! You have it in your power to secure the immense and eternal goods of Paradise, and you lose your time in procuring the miserable goods of this earth, which shall end at death. And for these you expose yourselves to the danger of the eternal torments of hell! Leave to us mortals, for whom all shall end at death, the care of these earthly things. But, we are all *immortal*, and each of us shall be eternally happy or eternally miserable in the next life.

But the misfortune is, the greater part of mankind is solicitous for the present and never thinks of the future. *Oh, that they would be wise and would understand, and would provide for their last end!*—(Deut. xxxii., 29). Oh! that they knew how to detach themselves from present goods which last but a short time, and to provide for eternity—where there will be a never-ending reign in Heaven, or never-ending slavery in hell. St. Philip Neri, conversing one day with Francis Zazzera, a young man of talent who expected to make a fortune in the world, said to him: "You will realize a great fortune; you will be a prelate, afterwards a Cardinal, and in the

end, perhaps, Pope! But what must follow? What must follow? Go, my son, think on these words." The young man departed, and after meditating on the words: *What must follow? What must follow?* he renounced his prospects in this world, and gave himself entirely to God. He entered the Congregation of St. Philip, and died a holy death.

The fashion of this world passeth away.—(1 Cor. vii., 31). On this passage, Cornelius à Lapide says that "the world is as it were a stage." Happy the man who acts his part well by saving his soul. But if he shall have spent his life in the acquisition of riches and worldly honours, he shall justly be called a fool; and at the hour of death he shall earn the reproach addressed to the rich man in the Gospel: *Fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee; and whose shall these things be which thou hast provided?*—(Luke xii., 20). In explaining the words, *they require*, Toletus says, that the Lord has given us our souls that we may guard them against the assaults of our enemies; and that at death the Angel will come to demand them of us, and present them at the tribunal of Jesus Christ. But if we shall have lost our souls by attending only to the acquisition of earthly possessions, these shall belong to us no longer; they shall pass to other hands: and what shall then become of our souls?

Poor worldlings! Of all the riches they have acquired, of all the pomps they displayed in this life, what shall they find at death? *They have slept their sleep: and all the men of riches have found nothing in their hands.*—(Ps. lxxv., 6). The dream of this present life shall be over at death, and they shall have acquired nothing for eternity. Ask the many great men of this earth—the princes and emperors who during life abounded in riches, honours, and pleasures, and are at this moment in hell—ask them what now remains of all the riches they possessed in this world! They answer with tears: "Nothing! Nothing!" And of so many honours enjoyed—of so many past pleasures—of so many pomps and triumphs, ask them what now remains! They answer with howlings: "Nothing! Nothing!"

Justly, then, has St. Francis Xavier said, that in the world there is but one good and one evil. The one good is the salvation of our souls; the one evil is losing them. Hence David said: *One thing I have asked of the Lord, this I will seek after—that I may dwell in the house of the Lord.*—(Ps. xxvi., 4). One thing only have I sought, and will forever seek, from God—that He may grant me the grace to save my soul; for, if I save my soul, all is safe; if I lose it, all is lost for ever!

Evening Meditation.

"*THE LORD MY REFUGE AND MY DELIVERER.*"

I.

The groans of death surrounded me and the sorrows of hell encompassed me, and in my affliction I called upon the Lord and he heard my voice . . . The Lord is my refuge and my deliverer.—(Introit of Mass. Ps. xvii).

In your desolation, and when creatures are unable to comfort you, have recourse to your Creator and say to Him: "Lord, men have only words for me." *My friends are full of words! Verbosi amici mei!*—(Job xvi., 21). They cannot comfort me; neither do I desire to be comforted by them: Thou art all my hope, all my love. Do Thou help me." Your God loves you more than you can love yourself, what, then, should you fear? *O thou of little faith why didst thou doubt?*—(Matt. xiv., 31).

God has declared that He shows favour towards those who put their confidence in Him. *He is the protector of all that trust in him.*—(Ps. xvii., 31). Whenever you doubt about our Lord hearing your prayer represent to yourself that He is chiding you as He did St. Peter, saying: *O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?*

—(Matt. xiv., 31). Why dost thou doubt My hearing thee, knowing as thou dost the promise I have made to grant the requests of every one that prays to Me?

And because God is willing to grant our requests it is His will that we believe that He certainly will grant them whenever we ask Him for graces: *All things whatsoever you ask, when ye pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you.*—(Mark xi., 24). Observe the words, *believe that you shall receive*; for they show that we must ask God for graces with a sure, unhesitating confidence that we shall receive them, as St. James also exhorts us: *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.* —(James, i., 6). In dealing with our God Who is all goodness, have great confidence, and rid yourself of everything like sadness. He who serves God and is sad, instead of honouring Him, treats Him rather with dishonour. St. Bernard tells us that he wrongs God who represents Him to himself as harsh and severe; being, as He is, Goodness and Mercy Itself. "How can you entertain a doubt," says the Saint, "of Jesus pardoning your sins, when He has affixed them to the Cross whereon He died for you, with the very nails by which His own hands were pierced?"

God declares that His delights are to be with us: *My delights are to be with the children of men.*—(Prov. viii., 31). If, then, it is God's delight to treat with us, it is only just that all our delights should consist in treating with Him; and this thought should give us courage to treat with God with every confidence, endeavouring to spend all that remains of life to us with our God Who loves us so much, and in Whose company we hope to be in Heaven for all eternity.

O my crucified Jesus, have pity upon me! I deserve every kind of suffering for such great sins as mine have been. However disconsolate, however abandoned by Thee, I protest it is my will ever to love Thee and bless Thee. Provided Thou dost not deprive me of the grace to love Thee, deal with me as Thou pleasest. Lord, take not away Thyself from me, but take all else besides as may seem good in Thy sight. Help Thy servant whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy Precious Blood.

II.

Let us, then, treat Him with all confidence and love, as our most dear and affectionate Friend Who loves us more than any other. Alas! some souls treat God as if He were a tyrant, from whose subjects only reserve and fear are required; and consequently they are apprehensive that, at every word inconsiderately spoken, at every thought which crosses their mind, God is angry with them, and disposed to cast them into hell. No; God does not take His grace away from us except when we knowingly and deliberately despise Him and turn our backs upon Him. And when, by some venial fault we slightly offend Him, He is certainly displeased by it, but does not therefore take from us the love which He bears towards us; whence by an act of contrition or of love, He is at once appeased. His infinite Majesty may justly claim all reverence and self-abasement from us; but He is better pleased that the souls that love Him should treat Him with loving confidence rather than with timid servility. So do not treat God as a tyrant. Recall to your mind the graces which He has bestowed upon you, even after the offences and acts of ingratitude which you have committed against Him; recollect the loving treatment which He has dealt out towards you, in order to extricate you from the disorders of your past life, and the extraordinary lights He has given you, by means of which He has so often called you to His holy love; and so treat Him from this day forth with great confidence and affection, as the dearest object of your love.

O my Jesus, I wish to be all Thine own, cost me what it may. I wish to love Thee with all my strength, but what can I myself do? Thy Blood is my hope. O Mary, Mother of God, my refuge, neglect not to pray for me in my tribulations. In the Blood of Jesus Christ, and then in thy prayers do I place my eternal salvation. In thee, O Lady have I hoped; I shall not be confounded for ever. Obtain for me the grace ever to love my God in life and in eternity. I ask for nothing more.

Monday after Septuagesima

Morning Meditation.

THE LOVE OF GOD.

I.—THE LOVE AND GOODNESS OF GOD TOWARDS US.

As long as God has been God He has loved us. As long as He has loved Himself He has loved us. *Let us, therefore, love God, because God hath first loved us.* —(1 Jo. iv., 10).

I.

Consider that God deserves your love, because He loved you before you loved Him, and because He has been the first of all to love you. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love.*—(Jer. xxxi., 3). Your parents have been the first to love you on this earth; but they have loved you only since they have known you. Before your father or your mother came into this world, God loved you: even before the world was created, He loved you. And how long before the creation of the world did God love you? Perhaps a thousand years, or a thousand ages? It is useless to count years or ages; God has loved you from eternity. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee.* (Jer. xxxi., 3). In a word, as long as He has been God, He has loved you; as long as He has loved Himself, He has loved you. Hence the holy virgin, St. Agnes, had reason to say: "I am prevented by another Lover." When the world and creatures sought her love, she answered: No, I cannot love you. My God has been the first to love me; it is but just, then, that I should consecrate all my love to Him alone.

Thus God has loved you from eternity, and through pure love has taken you from among so many men whom He could create; He has given you existence, and has placed you in the world. For the love of you God has created so many other beautiful creatures, that they might serve you, and remind you of the love He has borne to you, and of the love you owe to Him. "Heaven and earth," says St. Augustine, "tell me to love Thee." When the Saint looked at the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the rivers, they appeared to him to speak, and say: "Augustine, love your God; for He has created us for you, that you might love Him." The Abbot de Rancé, Founder of La Trappe, when he saw a hill, a fountain, or a flower, would say that all these creatures upbraided him with ingratitude to God. In holding a flower or fruit in her hand, St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi felt her heart wounded as it were by a dart of Divine love, and would say within herself: "Then, my God has from eternity thought of creating this flower or fruit, that I might love Him."

O sovereign Lord of Heaven and earth, infinite Good, infinite Majesty, Who hast loved men so tenderly, how does it happen that Thou art so much despised by them? But among these men, Thou, O my God, hast loved me in a particular manner, and hast bestowed on me special graces which Thou hast not given to so many others. And I have despised Thee more than others. I prostrate myself at Thy feet; O Jesus, my Saviour, *Cast me not away from thy face!*—(Ps. l., 13). I should deserve to be cast off on account of my ingratitude to Thee. But Thou hast said that Thou wilt not reject a penitent soul that returns to Thee. *Him that cometh to me, I will not cast out.*—(Jo. vi., 37).

II.

Consider, moreover, the special love God has shown to you in allowing you to be born in a Christian country, and in the bosom of the true Church. How many are born among idolaters, Jews, Mohammedans, or heretics, and are all lost! The number of those who have the

happiness of being born in a country where the true Faith prevails, is small, compared with the rest of mankind; and He has chosen you to be one of that small number. Oh, what an infinite gift is the gift of Faith! How many millions are deprived of the Sacraments, of sermons, of the examples of good companions, and of all the other helps to salvation which are found in the true Church! And God is resolved to give all these great helps to you without any merit on your part, and even with a foreknowledge of your demerits; for when He thought of creating you, and bestowing these graces upon you, He foresaw the insults you would offer to Him.

My Jesus, I am sorry for having offended Thee. Hitherto I have not known Thee. I now acknowledge Thee for my Lord and Redeemer, Who hast died to save me and to be loved by me. When, O my Jesus, shall I cease to be ungrateful to Thee? When shall I begin truly to love Thee with a true love? Behold, I this day resolve to love Thee with my whole heart, and to love nothing but Thee. O infinite Goodness, I adore Thee for all those who do not adore Thee, and I love Thee for all who do not love Thee. I believe in Thee, I hope in Thee, I love Thee, and offer my whole being to Thee. Assist me by Thy grace; Thou knowest my weakness. But if Thou didst bestow so many graces upon me when I neither loved nor desired to love Thee, how much greater graces should I hope for from Thy mercy now that I love Thee and desire only to love Thee! My Lord, give me Thy love, but a fervent love which will make me forget all creatures: a strong love, which will make me conquer all difficulties in order to please Thee; a constant love, which will never be dissolved between me and Thee. I hope for all graces through Thy merits, O my Jesus. And I hope for them through thy intercession, O my Mother, Mary.

Spiritual Reading.

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

V.—PATIENCE.

St. James says that Patience is the perfect work of a soul : *Patience hath a perfect work.*—(James i., 4). It is by Patience that we are to obtain Heaven. This world is the place for meriting, and hence not a place of repose, but of labour and suffering. For this end God has given us life, that by patience we may obtain the glory of Heaven. In this world all must have their sufferings : he who suffers with patience suffers less, and is saved ; he who suffers with impatience, suffers more and is lost. Our Lord does not send us crosses that we may be lost, as certain impatient souls would tell us, but that we may be saved and merit greater glory in Heaven. Sorrows, adversities, and all other tribulations received with patience, become the most beautiful jewels in our heavenly crown. When, therefore, we are in affliction, let us take comfort and thank God for them, for it is a sign that God desires to save us. He chastises us in this life, in which chastisements are light and short, that He may spare us in the next, in which chastisements are grievous and eternal. Unhappy the sinner who is prosperous in this life ! It is a sign that God reserves for him an eternal chastisement.

St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi says : " Pain, however great, becomes sweet when we look upon Jesus Christ on the Cross." St. Joseph Calasantius adds : " He gains not Jesus Christ who suffers not for Jesus Christ." He, then, who loves Jesus Christ, supports with patience all external crosses, infirmities, pains, poverty, dishonour, loss of parents and friends ; and all interior crosses, anguish, weariness, temptations, and desolation of spirit ; and suffers all in peace. On the contrary, what does he gain, who, in tribulations, becomes impatient and angry ? He does but increase his sufferings, and lays up for him-

self greater sufferings for another life. St. Teresa writes : " The cross is felt by those who drag it by compulsion : but not by those who embrace it with a good will." Hence, St. Philip Neri says : " In this world there is no purgatory, but a heaven or a hell : heaven for those who patiently support tribulations, and hell for those who do not." To proceed to the practice.

First Patience must be practised in sickness. The time of illness tests the spirit of a man whether it be gold or lead. Some are all devotion and happiness when in good health ; but when visited by some illness they lose patience, complain of everything, and give themselves up to melancholy, and commit a thousand other faults. The gold turns out to be lead ! St. Joseph Calasantius said : " If the sick were patient, we should hear no more complaints." Some complain and say : " But as long as I am in this state, I cannot go to church, nor to Communion, nor to Mass ; in short, I can do nothing." You say you can do *nothing*. You do *everything* when you do the will of God. Tell me, why do you want to do those things you mention ? Is it to give pleasure to God ? This is the pleasure of God, that you should embrace with patience all you have to endure, and should leave alone everything else that you wish to do. " God is served," writes St. Francis de Sales, " more by suffering for Him than by working for Him."

If in our sickness there be danger of death, then especially must we accept it with all patience, being willing to die should the end of our life be really at hand. Neither let us speak thus : " But I am not now prepared ; I should like to live a little longer to do penance for my sins." And how do you know that if you were to live longer, you would do penance and not fall into greater sins ? How many there are who, after recovering from some mortal illness, became worse than they were before, and were lost ; while, perhaps, if they had died then, they would have been saved ! If it is the will of God that you should leave this world, unite yourself to His holy will, and thank Him for giving you the help of the holy Sacraments, and accept death with tranquillity,

abandoning yourself into the arms of His mercy. This compliance with the Divine will, by accepting death, will be sufficient to insure your eternal salvation.

In the second place, we must accept also with patience the death of relations and friends. Some on the death of a relation are so inconsolable, that they leave off saying their prayers, frequenting the Sacraments, and all their devotions. Such a one goes so far as even to be angry with God and to say : " Lord, why hast Thou done it !" What rashness this is ! Tell me, what does all your grief profit you ? Do you perhaps think to give pleasure to the dead friend ? No. You displease both him and God. He desires that through his death you become more united to God, and pray for him if he be in Purgatory.

Evening Meditation.

PRAYER.

II.—ITS NECESSITY.

I.

Let us reflect on the necessity of prayer. St. Chrysostom says that as the body without the soul is dead, so the soul without prayer is dead. He also teaches that as water is necessary for plants, so is prayer necessary to save us from perdition. *God wills that all men should be saved*—(1 Tim. ii., 4)—and wills not that any one be lost. *The Lord . . . dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any one should perish, but that all should return to penance.*—(2 Pet. iii., 9). But He also wishes that we ask Him for the graces necessary for salvation. For on the one hand, it is impossible for us to observe the Divine commands and save our souls without the actual assistance of God; and on the other, God will not, ordinarily speaking, give us His graces unless we ask them from Him. Hence the Holy Council of Trent has declared that God has not commanded impossi-

bilities; because He either gives us the proximate and actual grace to fulfil His precepts, or He gives us the grace to ask Him for this actual assistance. St. Augustine teaches that God gives without prayer the first graces, such as vocation to the Faith and to repentance; but all other graces, and particularly the gift of perseverance, He gives only to those who ask them. Hence theologians teach, that for adults prayer is necessary as a means of salvation; so that, without prayers, it is impossible to be saved.

Ah, my Redeemer, how have I been able hitherto to live in such forgetfulness of Thee! Thou wert prepared to grant me all the graces I should ask of Thee; Thou didst only wait for me to ask them. But I have thought only of indulging my passions, and have been indifferent to the privation and loss of Thy love and Thy graces. Lord, forget my ingratitude, and have mercy on me. Pardon me all the displeasure I have given Thee, and grant me perseverance.

II.

The Scriptures are clear. For we read: *We ought always to pray.*—(Luke xviii., 1). *Pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*—(Luke xxii., 40). *Ask and you shall receive.*—(Jo. xvi., 24). *Pray without ceasing.*—(1 Thess. v., 17). The words *we ought*, *pray*, *ask*, according to St. Thomas and theologians generally, imply a strict precept which binds under grievous sin, particularly in three cases. First, when a person is in a state of sin; secondly, when he is in danger of death; and thirdly, when he is in great danger of falling into sin. Theologians teach that, ordinarily, he who neglects prayer for a month, or at most for two months, is guilty of a mortal sin. The reason is, because prayer is a means without which we cannot obtain the helps necessary for salvation.

Ask and you shall receive. He who asks receives: then, say St. Teresa, he who does not ask does not receive. And before, St. James said the same. *You have not, because you ask not.*—(James iv., 2). Prayer is particularly necessary to obtain the virtue of

continence. *And*, said the Wise Man, *as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent except God gave it . . I went to the Lord and besought him.*—(Wis. viii., 21) Let us conclude that he who prays is certainly saved; he who does not pray is certainly lost. All the elect are saved by prayer; all the damned are lost by neglect of prayer. And their greatest despair is, and shall be for ever, caused by the conviction, that they had it in their power to save their souls so easily by prayer, and that now the time of salvation is no more.

O God of my soul, give me the grace always to ask Thy aid not to offend Thee. Do not permit me to be, as I have hitherto been, negligent in the performance of this duty. Grant me light and strength always to recommend myself to Thee, and particularly when my enemies tempt me to offend Thee again. Grant, O my God, this grace through the merits of Jesus Christ, and through the love which Thou bearest to Him. O Lord, I have offended Thee enough. I wish to love Thee during the remainder of my life. Give me Thy love; and may this love remind me to ask Thy aid whenever I am in danger of losing Thee by sin. Mary, my hope after Jesus, through thy intercession I hope for the grace to recommend myself in all my temptations to thee and to thy Son. Hear me, O my Queen, through the love which thou bearest to Jesus Christ.

Tuesday after Septuagesima

Morning Meditation.

THE LOVE OF GOD.

II.—GOD HAS GIVEN HIMSELF TO US.

Accursed sin robbed us of Divine grace and made us the slaves of hell, but, to the astonishment of Heaven and of all nature, the Son of God came on earth as Man in order to redeem us from eternal death and purchase

for us grace and eternal glory which we had lost. *He emptied himself taking the form of a servant . . . and in habit found as a man.*—(Phil. ii., 7).

I.

God has given us many beautiful creatures, indeed, but He was not content until He even gave us Himself. *Christ hath loved us and hath delivered himself for us.*—(Eph. v., 2). Accursed sin had robbed us of Divine grace, and made us the slaves of hell; but, to the astonishment of Heaven and of all nature, the Son of God came on earth as Man in order to redeem us from eternal death, and purchase for us grace and the eternal glory which we had lost. How great would be our wonder if we saw a monarch become a worm for the love of worms! But our astonishment should be infinitely greater at the sight of God made Man for the love of men. *He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant . . . and in habit found as man.*—(Phil. ii., 7). God clothed in flesh! *And the word was made flesh.*—(Jo. i., 14). But the astonishment increases when we see all that the Son of God has done and suffered for the love of us. To redeem us it would have been sufficient for Him to shed a single drop of His Blood, or a single tear, or to offer a single prayer; for a prayer offered by a Divine Person would be of infinite value, and therefore sufficient for the salvation of the whole world, and of an infinite number of worlds. But, says St. Chrysostom, what was sufficient for redemption was not sufficient for the immense love that God bore to us. He not only wished to save us, but, because He loved us ardently, He wished to be loved ardently by us; and therefore He resolved to lead a life full of sorrows and humiliations, and to suffer a death the most painful of all deaths, in order to make us understand the infinite love which He entertained for us. *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.*—(Phil. ii., 8). O excess of Divine love, which all men and Angels will never be able to comprehend! I say *excess*; for Moses and Elias,

speaking of the Passion of Jesus Christ, called it an *excess*.—(Luke ix., 31). St. Bonaventure called the Passion of Christ an " excess of sorrow and of love."

O my Jesus, I see that Thou couldst have done nothing more in order to compel me to love Thee; and I also see that by my ingratitude I have laboured to force Thee to abandon me. Blessed forever be Thy patience which has borne with me so long. I deserve a hell made on purpose for myself; but Thy death gives me confidence. Ah! make me understand well the claims which Thou, O infinite Good, hast to my love, and the obligations by which I am bound to love Thee. I knew, O my Jesus, that Thou didst die for me; how then, O God, have I been able to live for so many years in forgetfulness of Thee? Oh that the past years of my life were to commence again! I would wish, O my Lord, to give them all to Thee. But years do not return. Ah, grant that I may at least spend all the remaining days of my life in loving and pleasing Thee.

II.

If our Redeemer had not been God, but a friend or a relative, what greater proof of love could He have given, than to die for us? *Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends*.—(Jo. xv., 13). If Jesus Christ had to save His own Father, He could not have done more for the love of Him! If you had been God and the Creator of Jesus Christ, what more could He have done for you than sacrifice His life in the midst of a sea of torments and sorrows, for the love of you? If the most contemptible man on earth had done for you what Jesus Christ has done for you, could you live without loving him?

But what do you say? Do you believe in the Incarnation and Death of Jesus Christ? You believe these Mysteries; and do you not love Him? Or, can you think of loving anything but Jesus Christ? He came on earth to suffer and to die for you in order to make known to you the immense love which He bears you. Before the Incarnation, man might doubt whether God loved him

tenderly; but how, after the Incarnation and death of Jesus Christ, can he any longer doubt that God loves him with the most tender love? And what greater tenderness of affection could Jesus show you, than to sacrifice His Divine life for the love of you? Our ears are accustomed to hear the words—Creation, Redemption, God in a manger, God on a Cross! O holy Faith, enlighten us!

My dear Redeemer, I love Thee with my whole heart; but increase this love within me. Remind me always of all that Thou hast done for me; and do not permit me to be any longer ungrateful to Thee. No; I will no longer resist the lights Thou hast given me. Thou didst wish to be loved by me, and I desire to love Thee. And whom shall I love, if I do not love a God of infinite beauty and infinite goodness, a God Who has died for me, a God Who has borne with me with so much patience, and Who, instead of chastising me as I deserved, has changed chastisements into graces and favours? Yes; I love Thee, O God, worthy of infinite love, and I sigh and seek to live wholly employed in loving Thee, and forgetful of everything but Thee. O infinite charity of my Lord, assist a soul that ardently desires to be entirely Thine. O great Mother of God, Mary, do thou, too, assist me by thy intercession; beg of Jesus to make me belong entirely to Him.

Spiritual Reading.

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

V.—PATIENCE (*continued*).

Thirdly: We must accept of poverty, if God sends it to us. Should you be in need of even necessaries, say, "My God, Thou alone art sufficient for me." An act of this kind would gain for you treasures in Heaven. He who possesses God has all good. And hence we should bear

with patience the loss of property, the failure of our expectations, and even the loss of those upon whom we depended. We must be resigned to the will of God, and God will support us; and if He be not pleased to help us, as we desire, we must be content with what He is pleased to do, because He does it to make trial of our patience, and to enrich us with greater merits and heavenly glory.

Fourthly: We must accept with patience contempts and persecutions. You will say: "But what evil have I done, that I should be thus persecuted? Why should I suffer this affront?" Complain thus to Jesus Christ crucified and He will answer you: "And what evil have I done, that I should suffer so many torments, ignominies, and this death of the Cross?" If, then, Jesus Christ has suffered all this for the love of you, it is no great thing that you should suffer this for the love of Jesus Christ. And especially if you have ever committed a very grievous sin, reflect that for it you deserve to be now in hell, where much greater sufferings and persecutions are endured from merciless devils. If you suffer any persecutions for having done good, rejoice exceedingly. Hear what Jesus Christ says: *Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice sake.*—(Matt. v., 10). Let us be convinced of the truth of what the Apostle says, that he who would live united to Jesus Christ in this world must be persecuted.

In the fifth place, we must practise patience also in spiritual desolation which is the heaviest affliction for a soul that loves God. But it is in this way God proves the love of His beloved ones. At such times let us humble ourselves and be resigned to the will of God, putting ourselves entirely into His hands. Let us be most careful also not to leave off any of our devotions, our prayers, frequenting of the Sacraments, our Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, or our Spiritual Reading. As we do everything then with weariness and trouble, it seems to us to be all lost, but it is not so: while we persevere in all these things, we work without any satisfaction to ourselves; but it is all very pleasing to God.

In the sixth and last place, we must practise patience in temptations. Some cowardly souls, when a tempta-

tion lasts a long time are disheartened, and will sometimes even say : God, then, desires my damnation. No; God permits us to be tempted, not for our damnation, but for our advantage, that we may then humble ourselves the more, and unite ourselves more closely to Him, by forcing ourselves to resist, redoubling our prayers, and thereby acquiring greater merits for Heaven. *And because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee.*—(Tob. xii., 13). Thus was it said to Tobias. Every temptation we overcome, gains for us fresh degrees of glory, and greater strength to resist future temptations. Nor does God ever permit us to be tempted beyond our strength : *And God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able ; but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it.*—(1 Cor. x., 13).

We should, indeed, beg our Lord to deliver us from temptations. However, when they come let us resign ourselves to His holy will, beseeching Him to give us strength to resist. St. Paul was troubled with carnal temptations, and he prayed to God to deliver him from them, but the Lord said to him : *My grace is sufficient for thee ; for power is made perfect in infirmity.*"—(2 Cor. xii., 9). In sensual temptations especially, the first precaution to be taken is to remove ourselves as far as possible from all occasions, and then immediately to have recourse to Jesus Christ for help, not trusting in our own strength. And when the temptation continues, let us not cease to pray, saying : " Jesus, help me ! Mary, ever Virgin, assist me !" The mere invocation of these all-powerful Names of *Jesus* and *Mary* will suffice to defeat the most violent assaults of hell. It is also of great use to make the sign of the Cross on our forehead, or over our heart. By the Sign of the Cross, St. Anthony, Abbot, overcame similar attacks of the devil. It is also a very good thing to acquaint your spiritual father with your temptations. St. Philip Neri used to say : " A temptation which is revealed is half conquered."

Evening Meditation.

PRAYER.

III.—THE CONDITIONS OF PRAYER.

Many pray but do not obtain the object of their prayers, because they do not pray as they ought. *You ask*, says St. James, *and receive not, because you ask amiss.*—(iv., 3). To pray well, it is necessary, in the first place, to pray with humility. *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*—(Ibid. iv., 6). God rejects the petitions of the proud but does not allow the humble to depart without hearing all their prayers. *The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds . . . and he will not depart till the Most High behold.*—(Ecclus. xxxv., 21). This holds, even in the case of sinners. *A contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*—(Ps. l., 19). Secondly, it is necessary to pray with confidence. *No one hath hoped in the Lord, and hath been confounded.*—(Ecclus. ii., 11). Jesus Christ has taught us to call God, in our petitions for His graces, by no other name than that of "Father," in order to make us pray with the same confidence with which a child has recourse to a parent. He, then, who prays with confidence, obtains every grace. *All things whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you.*—(Mark xi., 24). And who, says St. Augustine, can fear that the promises of God, Who is Truth Itself, will be violated? God, says the Scripture, is not like men, who promise, but do not perform, either because they intend to deceive, or because they change their minds. *God is not as man, that he should lie, nor as the son of man, that he should be changed. Hath he said them, and will he not do?*—(Num. xxiii., 19). And why, adds the same St. Augustine, should the Lord so earnestly exhort us to ask His graces, if He did not wish to bestow them upon us? By His promises He bound Himself to grant us the graces we ask of Him.

But some will say : I am a sinner, and therefore I do not deserve to be heard. In answer, St. Thomas says that the efficacy of prayer to obtain graces, depends, not on our merits, but on the Divine Mercy. *Every one*, says Jesus Christ, *that asketh receiveth*—(Luke xi., 10) —that is, every one, whether he be a just man or a sinner. But the Redeemer himself takes away all fear, saying : *Amen, amen, I say to you : if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you.*—(Jo. xvi., 23). As if He said : Sinners, if you are without merit, I have merit before My Father. Ask, then, in My Name, and I promise that you shall receive whatsoever you ask. But it is necessary to know that this promise does not extend to temporal favours, such as health, and the like; for God often justly refuses these favours, because He sees that they would be injurious to our salvation. "The physician," says St. Augustine, " knows better than the patient, what is useful to him." The holy Doctor adds, that God refuses to some in His mercy, what He gives to others in His wrath. Hence we should ask temporal blessings only on condition that they shall be profitable to the soul. But spiritual graces, such as pardon of sins, perseverance, Divine love, and the like, should be asked absolutely, and with a firm confidence of obtaining them. *If*, says Jesus Christ, *you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from Heaven give the good spirit to them that ask him?*—(Luke xi., 13).

II.

Above all, perseverance in prayer is necessary. Cornelius à Lapide says, that the Lord " wishes us to persevere in prayer even to importunity." This may be inferred from the following passages of Scripture : *We ought always to pray.*—(Luke xviii., 1). *Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times.*—(Luke xxi., 36). *Pray without ceasing.*—(1 Thess. v., 17). It may also be inferred from our Lord's repeated exhortations to prayer. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.*—(Luke xi., 9).

It might be sufficient to have said *ask*; but no; the Lord wishes us to understand that we ought to imitate beggars, who do not cease *to ask*, *to entreat*, and *to knock* at the gate until they receive an alms. But *final perseverance* in particular, is a grace which is not obtained without continual prayer. We cannot *merit* this grace of perseverance; but, according to St. Augustine, it may be merited in a certain manner. "This gift," says the holy doctor, "can be suppliantly merited; that is, it may be obtained by supplication." Let us, then, if we wish to be saved, pray always, and never cease to pray. And let all confessors and preachers, if they desire the salvation of souls, never cease to exhort their penitents or hearers to prayer. And, in conformity with the advice of St. Bernard, let us always have recourse to the intercession of Mary, "for what she asks she obtains, and her prayer cannot be fruitless."

My God, I hope that Thou hast already pardoned me; but my enemies will not cease to fight against me till death. Unless Thou dost assist me, I shall lose Thee again. Ah, through the merits of Jesus Christ, I ask for holy perseverance. Do not permit me to be separated from Thee. And I ask the same grace for all who are at present in the state of grace. I hope with certainty in Thy promise, and that Thou wilt give me perseverance if I shall continue to ask it from Thee. But I fear that in my temptations I shall neglect to have recourse to Thee, and that thus I shall relapse into sin. I therefore ask of Thee the grace never more to neglect prayer. Grant that in the occasions in which I shall be in danger of relapsing, I may recommend myself to Thee, and may invoke the most holy Names of *Jesus* and *Mary*. My God, this I purpose and hope to do with the assistance of Thy grace. Hear me for the sake of Jesus Christ. O Mary, my Mother, obtain for me the grace, that in all dangers of losing God, I may have recourse to thee and thy Son.

Wednesday after Septuagesima

Morning Meditation.

THE LOVE OF GOD.

III.—THE LOVE HE HAS SHOWN US IN HIS PASSION.

I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptised, said Jesus, *and how am I straitened until it be accomplished.* —(Luke xii., 50). I am to be baptized with the Baptism of My own Blood, and I feel myself dying through a desire that My Passion and death may come soon that thus man may know the love I bear him. Ah, my Jesus, men do not love Thee because they do not think of the love Thou hast had for them.

I.

Our astonishment increases more and more when we consider the ardour with which Jesus Christ desired to suffer and die for the love of us. *I have a baptism*, said Jesus Christ, *wherewith I am to be baptized; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished.*—(Luke xii., 50). I am to be baptized with the Baptism of My own Blood; and I feel Myself dying through a desire that My Passion and death may soon come, that thus man may know the love I bear to him. It was this desire that made Jesus say on the night before His Passion : *With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you before I suffer.*—(Luke xxii., 15). Then, says St. Basil of Seleucia, it appears that our God cannot be satiated with loving men.

Ah, my Jesus, men do not love Thee because they do not think of the love Thou hast had for them. O God ! how is it possible for a soul to live without loving God,

if she considers that He died for her sake and died with so great a desire of showing His love for her? *The charity of Christ presseth us.*—(2 Cor. v., 14). St. Paul says that it is not so much what Jesus Christ has done and suffered for our salvation, as the love He displayed in suffering for us, that obliges, and, as it were, forces us to love Him. Contemplating the love which Jesus Christ exhibits in His Passion, St. Laurence Justinian exclaimed: We have seen Wisdom Itself as it were foolish, through the excess of love for us. And who could ever believe, had not Faith assured us of it, that the Creator should die for His own creatures? In an ecstasy, St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, holding a Crucifix in her hands, exclaimed: "Yes, my Jesus, Thou art foolish through love." This the Gentiles also said when they heard the Apostles preaching the death of Jesus Christ. They regarded it as a folly which could not be believed. *We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness.*—(1 Cor. i., 23). And how, said they, could a God that is most happy in Himself, and stands not in need of anyone, descend on earth to become Man and die for the love of men who are His creatures? This would be the same as to believe that a God had become foolish for the sake of men. But it is of Faith that Jesus Christ the true Son of God, delivered Himself to death for the love of us. *Christ hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us.*—(Eph. v., 2).

Ah, my dear Redeemer, it is true that I have not loved Thee, because I have not reflected on the love Thou hast borne me! Ah, my Jesus, I have been very ungrateful to Thee. Thou hast given Thy life for me by submitting to the most painful of all deaths; and have I been so ungrateful as not even to think of Thy sufferings? Pardon me; I promise, O my crucified Love, that from this day forward Thou shalt be the only object of my thoughts and of all my affections! Ah, when the devil or the world presents me with forbidden fruit, remind me, O my beloved Saviour, of the pains Thou hast endured for my sake, that I may love Thee, and may never more offend Thee! Ah, if one of my servants had done for

me what Thou hast done, I could not bring myself to displease him. And I have dared to turn my back so often on Thee Who hast died for me.

II.

He has done so that we may live no longer to the world, but only to that Lord Who has died for us. *Christ died for all, that they also who live may not live to themselves, but unto him who died for them.*—(2 Cor. v., 15). He has done it, that, by the love which He has shown us, He might win all the love of our hearts. *For to this end Christ died and rose again, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and of the living.*—(Rom. xiv., 9). Hence the Saints, contemplating the death of Jesus Christ, thought it very little to give their life and all things for the love of so loving a God. How many nobles, how many princes have left relatives, riches, and country, and even kingdoms, to shut themselves away in a cloister, in order to live only to the love of Jesus Christ! How many Martyrs have sacrificed their lives! How many tender virgins, renouncing the nuptials of the great, have gone with joy to death, in order thus to make some return for the affection of a God who died for their sake! And what have you hitherto done for the sake of Jesus Christ? As He has died for the Saints—for St. Lawrence, for St. Lucy, for St. Agnes, so He has also died for you. What do you intend to do during the remaining days of life which God gives you that you may love Him? From this day forward, look frequently on the Crucifix, and in looking on it, call to mind the love which Jesus Christ has borne you, and say: *Then, hast Thou, my God, died for me?* Do this at least, I say, and do it often; if you do, you cannot but feel yourself sweetly constrained to love a God Who has loved you so tenderly.

O beautiful flames which have obliged a God to give His life for me, come, inflame, fill my whole heart, and destroy all affections towards created things. Ah! my beloved Redeemer, how is it possible for me to contemplate Thee, either in the Manger in Bethlehem, on the Cross on Calvary, or in the Sacrament on our Altars, and

not be enamoured of Thee? My Jesus, I love Thee with my whole soul. During the remaining years of my life thou shalt be my only Good, my only Love. I have unhappily lived long enough forgetful of Thy Passion and of Thy love. I give Thee all things, and if I do not give myself to Thee as I ought, take me, and reign in my whole heart. *Thy kingdom come!* May my heart be the servant of Thy love. May I speak of nothing else, may I sigh and desire only to love and please Thee. Assist me always by Thy grace, that I may be faithful to Thee. In Thy merits I trust, O my Jesus. O Mother of fair love, make me ardently love thy Son Who is so amiable, and Who has loved me so tenderly.

Spiritual Reading.

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

VI.—CONFORMITY TO GOD'S WILL.

All sanctity consists in loving God; and the love of God consists in fulfilling His holy will. In this is our life: *And life in his will.*—(Ps. xxix., 6). And he who is united with the will of God is always in peace; for the Divine will takes away the bitterness of every cross. By saying: *God wills it so*; *God has so willed*,—holy souls find peace in all their labours: *Whatsoever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad*:—(Prov. xii., 21). You say: Everything goes wrong with me; God sends me all kinds of misfortunes. Things go wrong with you, because you make them go wrong; if you were resigned to the will of God, all would go well, and for your good. The crosses which God sends you are misfortunes, because you make misfortunes of them; if you would accept them with resignation, they would no longer be misfortunes, but riches for Paradise. Venerable Balthazar Alvarez says: "He who in his

troubles resigns himself with peacefulness to the Divine will, runs to God post-haste." Let us now come to the practice.

And first, let us resign ourselves *in the illnesses that befall us.* Worldly people call illnesses misfortunes, but the Saints call them visitations of God and favours. When we are ill we ought certainly to take remedies in order to be cured, but we should always be resigned to whatever God may will. And if we pray for restoration to health, let it always be done with resignation, otherwise we shall not obtain the favour. Oh, how much we gain when we are ill by offering to God all we suffer! He who loves God from his heart does not desire to be cured of his illness in order to avoid suffering, but he desires to please God by suffering. It was this love which made the scourge, the rack, and the burning pitch sweet to the holy Martyrs. We must also be especially resigned when the sickness is mortal. To accept death at such a time, in order that the will of God may be fulfilled, merits for us a reward similar to that of the Martyrs, because they accepted death to please God. He who dies in union with the will of God makes a holy death; and the more closely he is united to it, the more holy the death does he die. The Venerable Blosius declares that an act of perfect conformity to the will of God at the hour of death delivers us not only from hell, but also from Purgatory.

Secondly, we must also unite ourselves to the will of God with regard to our *natural defects*, as, for example, want of talent, being of low birth, weak health, bad sight, want of ability for business, and the like. All that we have is the free gift of God. Might He not have made us a fly or a blade of grass? A hundred years ago we were only nothingness. And what do we want? Let it suffice that God has given us the power of becoming Saints. Although we may have little talent, poor health, and may be poor and abject, we may very well become Saints through His grace if we have the will. Oh, how many unfortunate beings have been damned on account of their talents, their health, high birth, riches or beauty! Let us then be content with what God has done for us;

and let us thank Him always for the good things He has given us, and particularly for having called us to the holy Faith; this is a great gift, and one for which few are found to thank God.

Thirdly, we must resign ourselves *in all adversities* that may happen to us, as the loss of property, disappointments, the death of relatives, the attacks and persecutions of men. You will say: But God does not will sin; how is it that I must resign myself when some one calumniates me, wrongs me, attacks or defrauds me? That cannot happen by the will of God. What a deception is this! God does not, of course, *will the sin* of such a one; He *permits it*; but, on the other hand, He *does will* the trial that you suffer at the hands of that person. So that it is our Lord Himself Who sends you that cross, though it comes to you by means of your neighbour; therefore even in these cases you must embrace the cross as coming from God. Nor let us seek to find a reason for such treatment. St. Teresa says: "If you are willing to bear only those crosses for which you see a reason, perfection is not for you."

Fourthly, we must be resigned *in aridity of soul*; if, when we say our prayers, receive Communion, visit the Blessed Sacrament, etc., all seems to weary and give us no comfort, let us be satisfied in knowing that we please God, and that the less satisfaction we feel ourselves in our devotions the more pleasure do we give Him. At no time can we better realise our own insufficiency and misery than in the time of aridity; and therefore let us humble ourselves in our prayers, and put ourselves with resignation into God's hands, and say: "Lord, I do not deserve consolations; I desire nothing but that Thou have pity on me; keep me in Thy grace, and do with me what Thou wilt." And thus we shall gain more in one day of desolation than in a month of tears and sensible devotion. And generally speaking, this should be the continual tenor of our prayers, offering ourselves to God, that He may do with us as He may please; saying to Him in our prayers, our Communions, and in the Visit: "My God, make me do Thy will." In doing the will of God we do everything. For this end let us accustom our-

selves to have always on our lips the ejaculation : *Fiat voluntas tua! Thy will be done!* And even in the least things we do; for instance, if we snuff out a candle, break a glass, stumble over something, let us always repeat : " May the will of God be done!" When we lose any of our possessions, or when one of our relatives dies, let us say : " O Lord, it is Thy will; it is my will also." And when we fear any temporal ill, let us say : " O Lord, I will whatever Thou willest." Thus we shall be very pleasing in the sight of God, and shall always be in peace.

Evening Meditation.

HOW MUCH IT PLEASES JESUS CHRIST THAT WE SUFFER FOR LOVE OF HIM.

I.

If any one will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.—(Luke ix., 23).

Jesus Christ says : *If any one will come after me.* He does not say *to me*; but, *after me.* The Lord desires that we should come close after Him. We must therefore walk in the same road of thorns and sufferings in which He walked. He goes before and rests not until He reaches Calvary where He dies. Wherefore if we love Him we must follow Him even unto death. Thus it is necessary that every one should deny himself; that is deny himself in everything self-love demands, and that is not pleasing to Jesus Christ.

Our Lord says further : *Let him take up his cross daily and follow me. Let him take up;* it avails little to carry the cross by compulsion. All sinners bear it, but without merit; to bear it with merit, we must embrace it voluntarily. *His cross;* under this word is implied every kind of tribulation, which is called a *cross* by Jesus Christ, in

order that the name may render it sweet, from the remembrance that He died on the Cross for the love of us.

O my Jesus, Thou alone hast been able to teach us these maxims of salvation, all contrary to the maxims of the world; and Thou alone canst give us strength to suffer crosses with patience. I do not pray Thee to exempt me from suffering; I only pray Thee to give me strength to suffer with patience and resignation.

II.

Jesus also says *his cross*. Some persons when they receive spiritual consolations, offer themselves to suffer as great things as were endured by the Martyrs,—hot irons, piercing nails and tortures; but then they cannot endure a headache, the carelessness of a friend, the ill-temper of a relative. God does not ask you to endure hot irons, piercing nails, and tortures; but He desires that you should suffer patiently this pain, this annoyance, this contempt. Some people would fain go to suffer in a desert, and perform great acts of penance; but yet they cannot endure such a one for Superior, or such a one for their companion in their duties; but God desires that we should bear that cross which He gives us to suffer, and not that which we would ourselves choose.

He says *daily*. Some persons embrace the cross at the beginning, when it comes to them; but when it lasts long they say, "Now I can bear no more." Yet God wills that we should go on to endure it with patience, and that we should bear it continually and even till death. See, then, that salvation and perfection consist in these three words, *let him deny*; we must deny to our self-love whatever is not right: *let him take up*; we must embrace the cross that God gives us: *let him follow*; we must follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ even unto death.

O Eternal Father, Thy Son has promised that whatever we ask Thee in His Name, Thou wilt give it to us. Behold, we ask this of Thee: give us grace to endure with patience the pains of this life; hear us for the love of

Jesus Christ. And Thou, O my Jesus, pardon me all the offences I have committed against Thee, in that I have not been willing to suffer with patience the troubles Thou hast sent me. Give me Thy love, that it may impart strength to suffer all for love of Thee. Deprive me of everything, of every earthly good, of relatives, friends, health of body, of every comfort; deprive me even of life; but not of Thy love. Give me Thyself, and I ask no more. O most holy Virgin, obtain for me an enduring love of Jesus Christ, even till death.

Thursday after Septuagesima

Morning Meditation.

DIVINE LOVE CONQUERS ALL THINGS.

The soul cannot exist without loving the Creator or creatures. Given a soul that is weaned of every other love, you will find it filled with Divine love. Do we wish to know whether we have given ourselves wholly to God? Let us examine ourselves whether we are weaned from every thing or not.

I.

Love is strong as death.—(Cant. viii., 6). As death separates us from all the goods of the world, from riches, honours, kindred, friends, and all earthly pleasures, so does the love of God, when it reigns in a heart, strip it of all affection for these perishable advantages. Therefore it was that the Saints stripped themselves of everything the world offered them, renounced their possessions, their posts of honour, and all they had, and fled to deserts or cloisters, to think upon and to love God alone.

Do we wish to know whether we have given ourselves wholly to God? Let us examine ourselves whether we are weaned from every earthly thing or not.

Some persons lament that in their devotions, prayers, Communions, Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, they do not find God. To such St. Teresa says: "Detach thy heart from creatures, and then seek God, and thou shalt find Him." Thou wilt not indeed find constant spiritual sweetness, for this God does not give without interruption even to those who love Him in this life, but bestows it only from time to time to make them fly onwards towards those boundless delights which He prepares for them in Paradise. He gives them, however, an inward peace which excels all sensual delights; that peace of God which surpasseth all understanding. And what greater delight can be enjoyed by a soul that loves God than to be able to say with true affection: "My God and my All!" St. Francis of Assisi continued a whole night in an ecstasy of Paradise continually repeating these words: "My God and my All! My God and my All!"

Love is strong as death. If a dying man were to give a sign of moving towards any earthly thing, we should then know that he was not dead; death deprives us of everything.

Divine love strips us of everything. Father Segneri, an eminent servant of God said: "Love of God is a beloved thief which robs us of every earthly thing." Another servant of God, when he had given to the poor all his possessions, and was asked what had reduced him to such poverty, took the Book of the Gospels out of his pocket, and said: "This has robbed me of everything." In a word, Jesus Christ will possess our whole heart, and He will have no companion there. St. Augustine writes that the Roman Senate refused to allow adoration to be paid to Jesus Christ because He was a haughty God Who claimed to be honoured alone; and truly as He is our only Lord, He has the right to be adored and loved with our undivided love.

II.

St. Francis de Sales says that the pure love of God consumes everything that is not God. When, then, we see in our heart an affection for anything that is not God, or for the sake of God, we must instantly banish it, saying, "Depart! There is no place for thee!" In this consists that complete renunciation which our Lord recommends, if we would be wholly His. It must be complete; that is, renunciation of everything, and especially of our friends and kindred. How many, for the sake of men, have never become Saints! David said that they who *please men* are *despised* by God.—(Ps. lii., 6).

But, above all, we must renounce ourselves by conquering self-love. Cursed is self-love, that thrusts itself into everything, even our most holy actions, by placing before us our own love of pleasure! How many preachers, how many writers, have thus lost all their labours! Constantly, even in Prayer, in Spiritual Reading, in Holy Communion, there enters some end not pure, either the desire of being noticed, or of merely obtaining spiritual pleasures. We must, therefore, strive to conquer this enemy who would ruin our best deeds. We must, as far as possible, deprive ourselves of everything that pleases us. We must deprive ourselves of this pleasure, for the very reason that it is agreeable; we must do a service to this ungrateful person, because he is ungrateful; we must take this bitter medicine, because it is bitter. Self-love makes it appear that nothing is good in which we do not find our own personal satisfaction; but he that would wholly belong to God must do violence to himself whenever he is employed in anything that is according to his own pleasure, and say always: "Let me lose everything, provided I please God."

For the rest, no one is more contented in this world than he who despises all the good things of the world. The more he strips himself of such good things, the richer he becomes in Divine grace. Thus does the Lord know how to reward those who love Him faithfully. But, O my Jesus, Thou knowest my weakness; Thou hast

promised to help those who trust in Thee. Lord, I love Thee; in Thee I trust; give me strength, and make me wholly Thine. In thee also I trust, O my sweet advocate, Mary!

Spiritual Reading.

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

VII.—PURITY OF INTENTION.

Purity of intention consists in doing everything with the sole view of pleasing God. The good or bad intention with which an action is performed renders it good or bad before God. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi says: God rewards actions according to the amount of purity of intention with which they are done." Let us examine how this virtue can be practised.

In the first place, in all our devotional exercises, let us seek God and not ourselves: if we seek our own satisfaction we cannot expect to receive any reward from God. And this holds good for all spiritual works. How many labour and exhaust themselves in preaching, hearing confessions, serving at the altar, and in doing other pious works; and because in these they seek themselves and not God, they lose all! When we seek neither approbation nor thanks from others for what we do, it is a sign that we work for God's sake: as also when we are not vexed when the good we undertake does not succeed; or when we rejoice as much at the good that is done by others, as if it had been done by ourselves. Further, whenever we have done some good in order to please God, and are praised for it, let us not torment ourselves in endeavouring to drive away vain-glory; it is enough to say: "To God be the honour and glory." And let us never omit any good action which may be edifying to our neighbour, through fear of vain-glory. Our Lord wishes us to do good even before others, that it may be profitable to them. *So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*—(Matt.

v., 16). Therefore when you do good, have first the intention of pleasing God; and secondly, that also of giving good example to your neighbour.

In the second place, in our bodily actions; whether we work, eat, drink, or amuse ourselves with propriety, let us do all in order to please God. Purity of intention may be called a heavenly alchemy which changes iron into gold. By which is meant, that the most trivial and ordinary actions done to please God become acts of Divine love. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi used to say: "A person who performs all his actions with a pure intention will go straight to Paradise." A holy hermit, before putting his hand to any work, used to raise his eyes to Heaven and keep them fixed there for a short time; and when asked what he was doing, he answered: "I am taking my aim, so that I may not miss the mark." Let us also do in like manner: before beginning any action, let us make sure of our aim, and say: "Lord, I do this to please Thee."

VIII.—RULES FOR AVOIDING TEPIDITY.

Souls that make no account of venial sins, and give themselves up to tepidity, without a thought of freeing themselves from it, live in great danger. We do not here speak of those venial sins that are committed through mere frailty, such as useless or idle words, interior disquietudes, and negligence in small matters; but we speak of venial sins committed with full deliberation, above all when they are habitual. St. Teresa writes thus: "From all deliberate sin, howsoever small it may be, O Lord, deliver us!" Venerable Alvarez used to say: "Those little backbitings, dislikes, culpable curiosity, acts of impatience and intemperance, do not indeed kill the soul, but they so weaken it, that when any great temptation attacks it unexpectedly, it will not have strength enough to resist, and will consequently fall." So that as on the one hand deliberate venial sins weaken the soul, so on the other they deprive us of the Divine assistance; for it is but just that God should be sparing with those who are sparing towards Him: *He*

who soweth sparingly, shall also reap sparingly.—(2 Cor. ix., 6). And this is what a soul that has received special graces from God has the most reason to fear, especially if such faults spring from some passionate attachment, as of ambition, or avarice, or of aversion, or inordinate affection towards any person. It happens not unfrequently to souls that are in bondage to some passion, as it does to gamblers, who, after losing many times, risk all on a final throw and so finish by losing everything. In what a miserable state is that soul which is the slave of some passion. Passion blinds us, and lets us no longer see what we are doing. Let us now see what we have to do, in order to be able to deliver ourselves from the wretched state of tepidity.

It is necessary in the first place to have a firm desire to get out of this state. The good desire lightens our labour, and gives us strength to go forward. And let us rest assured that he who makes no progress in the way of God will always be going back; and he will go back so far that at last he will fall over some precipice. Secondly, let us try to find out the predominant fault to which we are most attached, whether it be anger, ambition, an inordinate affection to persons or things. A resolute will overcomes all with the help of God. Thirdly, we must avoid the occasion, otherwise all our resolutions will fall to the ground. And lastly, we must above all be diffident of our own strength, and pray continually with all confidence to God, begging Him to help us in the danger in which we are, and to deliver us from those temptations by which we shall fall into sin; which is the meaning of the petition, "Lead us not into temptation." He who prays obtains: *Ask, and you shall receive.*—(Jo. xvi., 24). This is God's promise, and can never fail; therefore we must always pray, always pray; and let us never leave off repeating: "My God, help me, and help me at once!"

Evening Meditation.

GIVING OF OURSELVES TO GOD WITHOUT RESERVE.

I.

God has declared that He loves all those who love Him : *I love them that love me.*—(Prov. viii., 17). But it is not to be supposed that God will give Himself entirely to one who loves anything in the world equally with God. At one time St. Teresa was in this state, keeping up an affection, not indeed an impure affection, but an inordinate one, for a certain relative. When, however, she divested herself of this attachment, God was pleased to say to her in a vision : " Now that thou art wholly Mine, I am wholly thine."

O my God, when will the day arrive when I shall be wholly Thine? Consume within me, I beseech Thee, by the flames of Thy Divine love, all those earthly affections which hinder me from belonging entirely to Thee. When shall I be able to say to Thee with truth : My God, Thee only do I desire, and besides Thee there is nothing that I wish for?

One is my dove, my perfect one is but one.—(Cant. vi., 8). God so loves the soul that gives itself entirely to Him that He seems to love no other; and hence He calls it His only dove. St. Teresa after her death revealed to one of her sisters that God has greater love for one soul that aspires to perfection than for a thousand others that are in a state of grace, but are tepid and imperfect. O my God, for how many years hast Thou invited me to become entirely Thine, and I have refused! Death is already approaching, and shall I die as imperfect as I have hitherto lived? No, I hope that death will not find me as ungrateful as I have hitherto been. Help me; for I desire to leave all things to become entirely Thine.

II.

Jesus Christ, through the love which He has for us, has given His whole Self to us. *He hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us.*—(Eph. v., 2). If, then, says St. Chrysostom, "God has given Himself entirely to you and without reserve : if He has given you all, and nothing more remains for Him to give you, as indeed He has done in His Passion and in the Holy Eucharist, reason requires that you also should give yourself without reserve to Him." St. Francis de Sales says : "The heart is too little to love our bountiful Redeemer Who has loved us even to laying down His life for us." Oh, what ingratitude, what injustice, to divide our hearts, and not to give them wholly to God !

Let us then say with the Spouse in the Canticles : *My beloved to me, and I to my beloved.*—(Cant. ii., 16). Thou, my God, hast given all to me, I will give all to Thee. I love Thee, my sovereign Good. My God and my All ! Thou desirest that I should be all Thine, and such do I desire to be. O Mary, my Mother, pray for me, that I may not love aught but God alone.

Friday after Septuagesima

Morning Meditation.

HE THAT LOVES JESUS CHRIST SHOULD HATE THE WORLD.

St. Paul writes that Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from the present wicked world according to the will of God and our Father.—(Gal. i., 4). As the lovers of God are hateful to the world, so the world ought to be hateful to him who loves God.

Jesus Christ desires we should become superior to the promises and threats of the world and no longer take account of its censures or its praise.

I.

Whosoever loves Jesus Christ with true love, let him greatly rejoice when he sees himself treated by the world as Jesus Christ was treated. He was hated, scorned, and persecuted by the world, even unto an agonizing death upon a shameful Cross. The world is altogether against Jesus Christ; and, therefore, hating Jesus Christ, it hates all His servants. Wherefore the Lord encouraged His disciples to suffer in peace all the persecutions of the world, saying to them that, having given up the world, they could not but be hated by the world. *Ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*—(Jo. xv., 19).

And as the lovers of God are hateful to the world, so the world ought to be hateful to him who loves God. St. Paul said : *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me.*—(Gal. vi., 14). The Apostle was an odious thing to the world, as a man condemned and dead upon a cross is odious; and in return, the world was odious to St. Paul : *The world is crucified to me.*

Jesus Christ chose to die upon the Cross for our sins, for this end, that He might deliver us from this wicked world. Our Lord, having called us to His love, desires that we should become superior to the promises and threats of the world. He desires that we should no longer take account of its censures or its praise. We must pray God to make us utterly forget the world, and to rejoice when we see the world reject us. It is not enough, in order to belong wholly to God, that we should abandon the world; we must desire that the world should abandon us, and utterly condemn us. Some people leave the world, but they do not cease to wish to be praised by it, at least for having abandoned it. In such persons the desire of worldly estimation causes the world still to live in them.

II.

Thus, then, the world hates the servants of God, and hates their good example and holy maxims; and therefore it is necessary that we should hate all the maxims of the world. *The wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can it be.* —(Rom. viii., 7). The Apostle says *it cannot be*, for this reason, that the world has no other object but its own interest or pleasure; and thus it cannot agree with those who seek only to please God.

Yea, O Jesus, crucified and dead for me, Thee alone I desire to please. What is the world, what are riches, what are honours? I desire that Thou, my Redeemer, shouldst be all my Treasure; to love Thee is my riches. If Thou wilt have me poor, I desire to be poor; if Thou wilt have me humbled and despised by all, I embrace all and receive all from Thy hands. Thy will shall ever be my comforter. This is the grace that I seek of Thee, that in every event I may never depart an instant from Thy holy will.

Spiritual Reading.

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

IX.—MEANS OF ACQUIRING THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Jesus Christ ought to be our whole love. He is worthy of it, both because He is a God of infinite goodness, and because He has loved us to such an excess, that He died for us. Oh, what a great obligation we are under to Jesus Christ! All the good we enjoy, all our inspirations, calls, pardons, helps, hopes, consolations, sweetnesses, and loving affections, come to us through Jesus Christ. Let us see by what means we are to acquire this love of Jesus Christ.

In the first place, we must *desire* to have this love of Jesus Christ, and we must, therefore, often ask Him to

give it to us, especially in our prayers, in our Communions, and in the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament. And this grace must also be sought through the hands of the ever-blessed Mary, from our Guardian Angel and our holy Patrons, that they may enable us to love Jesus Christ. St. Francis de Sales says that the grace of loving Jesus Christ contains all other graces in itself; because he who truly loves Jesus Christ cannot be wanting in any virtue.

In the second place, if we wish to acquire the love of Jesus Christ, we must detach our hearts from all earthly affections; Divine love will find no place in a heart that is full of this world. St. Philip Neri used to say: "The love we give to creatures is all so much taken from God."

In the third place, we must often exercise ourselves, especially when we pray, in making acts of the love of Jesus Christ. Acts of love are the fuel with which we keep alive the fire of holy charity. Let us make acts of love and complacency, saying: "My Jesus, I rejoice that Thou art infinitely happy, and that Thy Eternal Father loves Thee as much as Himself." Of benevolence: "I wish, my Jesus, that all could know and love Thee." Of predilection, as: "My Jesus, I love Thee more than all things! I love Thee more than myself!" Let us also often make acts of contrition, which are called acts of sorrowful love.

In the fourth place, if any one wishes to make sure of being inflamed with love towards Jesus Christ, let him try to meditate often on His Passion. It was revealed to a holy solitary, that no exercise was more efficacious in enkindling love, than the consideration of the sufferings and ignominy which Jesus Christ endured for love of us. I say, it is impossible that a soul, meditating often on the Passion of Jesus Christ, should be able to resist His love. It was for this that, although He could have saved us by one drop of His Blood, nay even by a single prayer, He chose to suffer so much, and to shed all His Blood, that He might attract all hearts to love Him; therefore he who meditates on His Passion does what is very agreeable to Him. Do you, then, often make your Meditation on the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do so at least

every Friday, the day on which He died for the love of us. For this purpose I have written many Meditations on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, especially the *Darts of Fire*, which speak of the love Jesus Christ has borne us in the great work of our Redemption.

Evening Meditation.

DIVINE LOVE VICTORIOUS OVER GOD HIMSELF.

I.

Our God is omnipotent : who, then, will ever overcome and conquer Him? Love towards man has conquered and triumphed over Him, says St. Bernard. For His love has caused Him to die in torments upon a disgraceful Cross to secure man's salvation. O infinite Love! Unhappy the soul that loves Thee not!

What man, not a believer, passing by Calvary on that day when Jesus was dying on the Cross, and enquiring who was that *criminal*, crucified in such a mangled state, was told it was the Son of God, true God, equal with His Father, would not have said with the Gentiles that to believe such things was folly? "It appeared folly," says St. Gregory, "that the Author of life should die for men." If it would have appeared folly to suppose that a king would become a worm for the love of a worm, greater still would have appeared the folly of believing that God had become Man for the love of man, to die for man. This led St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi to say, concerning this immense love of God, "My Jesus, Thou lovest us to madness."

And, alas! I, a miserable sinner, have not loved God, but have many times offended Him!

II.

Christian, lift up your eyes, and behold that afflicted one upon the Cross, oppressed with grief and torments,

struggling in His agony, on the point of expiring, dying for the pure love of you. Know you who He is? He is your God. And if you believe that He is your God, ask who has reduced Him to such a miserable condition. "What has done this?" asks St. Bernard. He answers: "Love has done it, regardless of its own dignity." It was love, which refuses no pain, or disgrace, when it would make itself known and exert itself for its beloved.

O Jesus, it was because Thou didst so much love me, that Thou didst suffer so much for me: if Thou hadst loved me less Thou wouldst have suffered less. I love Thee, my dear Redeemer, with my whole heart. And how can I refuse God my whole love, when He has not refused me His Precious Blood, His life? I love Thee, O Jesus, my Love, my All! Holy Mary, Virgin of virgins, help me by thy prayers faithfully to love Jesus.

Saturday after Septuagesima

Morning Meditation.

SOULS THAT LOVE GOD DESIRE TO GO TO SEE HIM IN HEAVEN.

The worldly-minded fear losing their earthly goods, fleeting and miserable things that they are, but the Saints only fear losing God Who is a Good infinite and eternal. Wherefore death is an object of terror to souls attached to the earth, while it is specially desired by those who love God; for, says St. Bernard, it is the termination of labour and the gate of life. They cry out with St. Paul: *Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* —(Rom. vii., 24).

I.

While we are in the body we are absent from the Lord. —(2 Cor. v., 6). Souls who, in this life love God alone are like noble pilgrims, destined, according to their present state, to be the eternal brides of the King of Heaven, but now live far away without seeing Him; wherefore they do naught but sigh for their departure to the country of the Blessed, where they know that their Spouse awaits them.

They know, indeed, that their Beloved is ever present with them, but is, as it were, hidden by a veil, and does not show Himself. Or, to speak more correctly, He is like the sun behind clouds, which from time to time, sends forth a ray of its splendour, but displays not itself fully. These beloved brides have a veil before their eyes, which prevents them from seeing Him Whom they love. They live, nevertheless, contented, uniting themselves to the Will of the Lord Who chooses to keep them in exile, and far away from Himself; but with all this, they cannot but continually sigh to see Him face to face, in order to be more inflamed with love towards Him.

Therefore, each one of them often sweetly complains to its beloved Spouse because He shows Himself not and says to Him : "O Thou only love of my heart, since Thou hast so loved me, and hast wounded me with Thy holy love, why hidest Thou Thyself, and allowest me not to see Thee? I know that Thou art infinite Beauty; I love Thee more than myself, though I have never yet beheld Thee. Open to me Thy beautiful countenance; I would know Thee all revealed, in order that I may no more look to myself nor to any creature, and may think only of loving Thee, my highest Good."

II.

When to souls thus enamoured of God there shines forth a ray of Divine goodness and of the love which God bears them, they would wish to be dissolved and melt away for desire of Him, and though for them the sun is still concealed behind the clouds, and His fair face hidden, and their own eyes veiled, so that they cannot

gaze on Him face to face; yet what shall be their joy when the clouds disperse, and the gates open, and the veil is taken from their eyes, and the fair countenance of their Beloved appears so that in the clear light of day they look upon His beauty, His goodness, His greatness, and the love He bears them!

O death, why dost thou so long delay to come? If thou comest not, I cannot depart to behold my God. It is thou that must open to me the gates, that I may enter into the palace of my Lord. O blessed country, when will the day come when I shall find myself within thy eternal tabernacles? O Beloved of my soul, my Jesus, my Treasure, my Love, my All! When will that happy moment come, when, leaving this earth, I shall see myself all united with Thee? I deserve not this happiness; but the love Thou hast shown me, and, still more, Thy infinite goodness makes me hope that I shall be one day joined to those happy souls, who, being wholly united with Thee, love Thee, and will love Thee with a perfect love through all eternity. O my Jesus, Thou seest the alternative in which I am placed, of being either united with Thee for ever, or for ever far from Thee! Have mercy upon me. Thy Blood is my hope; and thy intercession, O my Mother Mary, is my comfort and my joy. Amen.

Spiritual Reading.

PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

Some devout souls, with great spiritual profit to themselves, are accustomed to renew every month, after having been at Confession and Communion, the *Protestation for Death*, imagining themselves at the point of death and about to depart from this world. Unless you do this during life you will find it hard at death to embrace with resignation and love death and all its pains. In her last illness that great servant of God, Sister Catherine of St. Albert, of the Order of St. Teresa, sighed

and said : " Sisters, I do not sigh through fear of death, for I have lived twenty-five years expecting it, but I sigh at the sight of so many Christians who spend their life in sin, leaving themselves only the hour of death to make their peace with God, when I can scarcely pronounce the Name of Jesus !"

EXERCISES FOR THE PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

Preparation for a Happy Death.

Under the Protection of St. Joseph, Patron of the Dying.

Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph.

1. O glorious St. Joseph, most pure Spouse of most holy Mary, even as the trouble and anguish of thy heart was great in the perplexity of abandoning thy most chaste and stainless Spouse ; so, too, inexplicable was thy delight when the Angel revealed to thee the sovereign mystery of the Incarnation.

Through this sorrow and this joy of thine, we pray thee now, and in our last agony, to comfort our souls with the joy of a good life and of a holy death like unto thine between Jesus and Mary.

" Our Father," " Hail Mary," and " Glory be to the Father."

2. O glorious St. Joseph, most blessed Patriarch, who wast selected for the office of reputed Father of the Word made Man ; the grief which thou didst feel at seeing the Child Jesus born in such great poverty was suddenly changed for thee into heavenly exultation at hearing the angelic harmony, and seeing the glories of that most resplendent night.

Through this sorrow and this joy of thine, we beseech thee to obtain for us that, after the journey of this life is over, we may pass hence to hear the angelic praises, and to enjoy the splendours of the glory of Heaven.

" Our Father," " Hail Mary," and " Glory be to the Father."

3. O glorious St. Joseph, who didst fulfil most obediently all God's commands, the most Precious Blood which the Child Redeemer shed in the Circumcision struck death into thy heart, but the Name of Jesus revived it, and filled it full of joy

Through this sorrow and this joy of thine, obtain for us that, all vices having been taken from us during life, we may expire in exultation with the Most Holy Name of Jesus in our hearts and upon our lips.

" Our Father," " Hail Mary," and " Glory be to the Father."

4. O glorious St. Joseph, most faithful Saint, who wast a partaker in the Mysteries of our Redemption, if Simeon's prophecy of that which Jesus and Mary were to suffer caused thee a mortal pang, it filled thee also with a blessed joy at the salvation and glorious resurrection of innumerable souls, which he at the same time foretold would thence proceed.

Through this sorrow and this joy of thine, obtain for us that we may be of the number of those who, through the merits of Jesus, and at the intercession of the Virgin Mother, are to rise again in glory.

" Our Father," " Hail Mary," and " Glory be to the Father."

5. O glorious St. Joseph, most watchful guardian and familiar attendant of the Incarnate Son of God, how much didst thou suffer in supporting and in serving the Son of the Most High, particularly in the flight which thou hadst to make into Egypt; but how much again didst thou rejoice at having always with thee that same God, and at seeing the idols of Egypt fall to the ground!

Through this sorrow and this joy of thine, obtain for us that, by keeping far from us hell's tyrant, especially by flying from dangerous occasions, every idol of earthly affection may fall from our hearts; and that, wholly occupied in the service of Jesus and of Mary, we may live for them alone, and die a happy death.

" Our Father," " Hail Mary," and " Glory be to the Father."

6. O glorious St. Joseph, Angel of the earth, who didst marvel at beholding the King of Heaven subject to thy commands, if thy consolation at bringing Him back from Egypt was disturbed by the fear of Archelaus, yet when assured by the Angel, thou didst dwell in joy with Jesus and Mary at Nazareth.

Through this sorrow and this joy of thine, obtain for us that our hearts, unclouded by hurtful fears, may enjoy peace of conscience, and that we may live secure with Jesus and Mary, and with them may also die.

" Our Father," " Hail Mary," and " Glory be to the Father."

7. O glorious St. Joseph, model of all holiness, when without fault of thine thou hadst lost the Child Jesus, thou didst seek Him for three days in the greatest sorrow, until with joyful heart thou didst possess again thy Life, finding Him in the Temple among the doctors.

Through this sorrow and this joy of thine, with fervent sighs we supplicate thee to interpose in our behalf, that so it may never befall us to lose Jesus by mortal sin; but that, if unhappily we ever lose Him, we may seek Him again with unwearied sorrow, until once more we find His favour, especially at the moment of our death, so that we may pass to the enjoyment of Him in Heaven, and there with thee sing His Divine mercies for all eternity.

" Our Father," " Hail Mary," and " Glory be to the Father."

Antiph. Jesus Himself was beginning about His thirtieth year, being (as it was supposed) the Son of Joseph.

V. Pray for us, O holy Joseph.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray.

O God, who by Thy ineffable Providence didst vouchsafe to choose the Blessed Joseph for the Spouse of Thy most holy Mother; grant, we beseech Thee, that he whom we venerate as our protector on earth may be our intercessor in Heaven. Who livest and reignest for ever and ever. Amen.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, assist me in my last agony.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, may I breathe out my soul in peace with you.

After which is said the following

PRAYER FOR A HAPPY DEATH.

O Lord Jesus, God of goodness and Father of mercies, I approach to Thee with a contrite and humble heart; to Thee I recommend my last hour, and that which then awaits me.

When my feet, now motionless, shall admonish me that my mortal course is drawing to an end;

R. Merciful Jesus have mercy on me.

When my hands, trembling and benumbed, no longer able to hold Thy crucified Image, shall let it fall from their feeble grasp upon my bed of pain;

R. Merciful Jesus, &c.

When my eyes, dim and troubled at the horror of approaching death, shall fix on Thee their languid and expiring looks;

R. Merciful Jesus, &c.

When my lips, cold and trembling, shall pronounce for the last time Thy adorable Name;

R. Merciful Jesus, &c.

When my cheeks, pale and livid, shall inspire the beholders with pity and dismay; and my hair, bathed in the sweat of death, and stiffening on my head, shall forbode my approaching end;

R. Merciful Jesus, &c.

When my ears, soon to be for ever shut to the discourse of men, shall open to hear Thy voice pronounce the irrevocable decree which shall decide my lot for eternity;

R. Merciful Jesus, &c.

When my imagination, agitated by horrid and terrifying phantoms, shall be sunk in mortal anguish; when my soul, affrighted at the sight of my iniquities and the

terrors of Thy judgments, shall have to fight against the angel of darkness, who will endeavour to conceal Thy mercies from my eyes, and plunge me into despair;

R. Merciful Jesus, &c.

When my poor heart, oppressed with the pains of sickness, and exhausted by its struggles against the enemies of its salvation, shall be seized with the pangs of death;

R. Merciful Jesus, &c.

When the last tears, forerunners of my dissolution, shall drop from my eyes, receive them as a sacrifice of expiation for my sins, that I may die the victim of penance; and in that dreadful moment,

R. Merciful Jesus, &c.

When my friends and relations, encircling my bed, shall shed the tear of pity over me, and invoke Thy clemency in my behalf;

R. Merciful Jesus, &c.

When I shall have lost the use of my senses, and the world shall have vanished from my sight; when I shall groan with anguish in my last agony and in the sorrows of death;

R. Merciful Jesus, &c.

When my last sighs shall summon my soul to go forth from my body, receive them as the effects of a holy impatience to fly to Thee; and in that moment,

R. Merciful Jesus, &c.

When my soul, trembling on my lips, shall bid adieu to the world, and leave my body lifeless, pale and cold, receive this separation as a homage, which I shall willingly pay to Thy Divine Majesty; and in that last moment of my mortal life,

R. Merciful Jesus, &c.

When at length my soul, admitted to Thy Presence, shall first behold with terror Thy awful Majesty, reject me not, but receive me into Thy bosom, where I may for ever sing Thy praises; and in that moment when eternity shall begin to me,

R. Merciful Jesus, &c.

Let us pray.

O God Who hast doomed all men to die, but hast concealed from all the hour of their death; grant that I may pass my days in the practice of holiness and justice, and that I may deserve to quit this world in Thy holy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

After the Hymn, the Blessed Sacrament will be exposed, and *O Salutaris* sung. Then follows—

THE PROTESTATION FOR DEATH.

My God, prostrate in Thy Presence, I adore Thee; and I intend to make the following protestation, as if I were on the point of passing from this life into eternity.

My Lord, because Thou art the Infallible Truth, and hast revealed it to the Holy Church, I believe in the Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; three Persons, but only one God; Who for all eternity rewards the just in Heaven, and punishes the wicked in hell. I believe that the Second Person, that is, the Son of God, became Man, and died for the salvation of mankind; and I believe all that the Holy Church believes. I thank Thee for having made me a Christian, and I protest that I will live and die in this holy Faith.

My God, my Hope, trusting in Thy promises, I hope from Thy mercy, not through my own merits, but through the merits of Jesus Christ, for the pardon of my sins, perseverance, and, after this miserable life, the glory of Paradise. And should the devil at death tempt me to despair at the sight of my sins, I protest that I will always hope in Thee, O Lord, and that I desire to die in the loving arms of Thy goodness.

O God, worthy of infinite love, I love Thee with my whole heart more than I love myself; and I protest that I desire to die making an act of love, that I may thus continue to love Thee eternally in Heaven, which for this end I desire and ask of Thee. And if hitherto, O Lord, instead of loving Thee, I have despised Thy infinite goodness, I repent of it with all my heart, and I protest that

I wish to die, always weeping over and detesting the offences I have committed against Thee. I purpose for the future rather to die than ever to sin again; and for the love of Thee I pardon all who have offended me.

O God, I accept of death, and of all the sufferings which will accompany it; I unite it with the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, and offer it in acknowledgment of Thy supreme dominion, and in satisfaction for my sins. Do Thou, O Lord, accept of this sacrifice which I make of my life, for the love of that great Sacrifice which Thy Divine Son made of Himself upon the Altar of the Cross. I resign myself entirely to Thy Divine will, as though I were now on my deathbed, and protest that I wish to die, saying, *O Lord, always Thy will be done.*

Most holy Virgin, my Advocate and my Mother, Mary, thou art and wilt always be, after God, my hope and my consolation at the hour of death. From this moment I have recourse to thee, and beg of thee to assist me in that passage. O my dear Queen, do not abandon me in that last moment; come then to take my soul and present it to thy Son. Henceforward, I shall expect thee; and I hope to die under thy mantle and clinging to thy feet. My Protector St. Joseph, St. Michael Archangel, my Angel Guardian, my holy Patrons, do you all assist me in that last combat with hell.

And Thou, my Crucified Love, Thou, my Jesus Who wert pleased to choose for Thyself so bitter a death, to obtain for me a good death, remember at that hour that I am one of those dear sheep Thou didst purchase with Thy Blood. Thou who, when all the world shall have forsaken me and not one shall be able to assist me, canst alone console me and save me, do Thou make me worthy then to receive Thee in the Viaticum, and suffer me not to lose Thee for ever, and to be banished for ever to a distance from Thee. No, my beloved Saviour, receive me then into Thy sacred Wounds, for I now embrace Thee. At my last breath I intend to breathe forth my soul into the loving Wound in Thy Side, saying now for that moment: *Jesus and Mary, I give you my heart and my soul.*

R. Jesus and Mary, I give you my heart and my soul. O happy suffering, to suffer for God! Happy death, to die in the Lord!

I embrace Thee now, my good Redeemer, that I may die in Thy embraces. If, O my soul, Mary assists you at your departure, and Jesus receives your last breath, it will not be death, but a sweet repose.

Then follows the *Tantum Ergo*, etc.

Evening Meditation.

MARY RENDERS DEATH SWEET TO HER CLIENTS.

I.

He that is a friend loveth at all times, and a brother is proved in distress.—(Prov. xvii., 17).

We can never know our friends and relatives in the days of prosperity: it is only in the time of adversity that we see them in their true colours. People of the world never abandon a person in prosperity; but should misfortune overtake him, and particularly if death be at hand, they immediately forsake him. The Blessed Virgin does not act thus with her clients. In all their afflictions, and more particularly in the sorrows of death, the greatest that can be endured in this world, this good Lady and Mother not only does not abandon her faithful servants, but as during our exile on earth she is *our life*, so at our last hour she is *our sweetness*, by obtaining for us a peaceful, happy death. For from the day on which Mary had the privilege and the sorrow of assisting at the death of Jesus her Son Who was the Head of all the predestined, it has become her privilege to assist also at their deaths. And for this reason the Holy Church teaches us to beg this most Blessed Virgin to assist us especially at the moment of our death. *Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.*

O how great are the sufferings of the dying! They suffer from remorse of conscience on account of past sins; from the fear of the approaching Judgment and from the uncertainty of salvation. Then it is that hell arms itself and spares no effort to gain the soul on the point of entering into eternity, for the devils know that only a short time remains in which to gain it, and that if they lose it then they lose it for ever. *The devil is come down unto you having great wrath knowing that he hath but a short time.*—(Apoc. xii., 12).

Oh, how quickly do the rebellious spirits fly from the presence of this great Queen! At the hour of death if only we have the protection of Mary what need we fear from all our infernal enemies? O you are indeed fortunate if at death you are bound in the sweet chains of the love of the Mother of God! These chains are chains of salvation.

O my most sweet Mother, how shall I die, poor sinner that I am? Even now the thought of that supreme moment in which I must expire and appear before the Judgment seat of God, and the remembrance of having myself so often written my condemnation by consenting to sin, makes me tremble. I am confounded and fear much for my salvation. O Mary, in the Blood of Jesus and in thy intercession is all my hope.

II.

A great lover of Mary said before expiring: "O my Father, would that you could know the happiness I now enjoy from having served the most holy Mother of God! I cannot tell you the joy I now experience!" Father Suarez in consequence of his devotion to Mary died with such peace and joy that he said: "I could not have thought that death was so sweet!" You will, without doubt, experience the same joy and contentment in death if you can then remember that you have loved this good Mother who cannot be otherwise than faithful to her children who were faithful in serving and honouring her by their Visits, Rosaries, Fasts, and still more by frequently thanking and praising her and often recommending themselves to her powerful protection.

Nor will this consolation be withheld even if you have been for a time a sinner, provided that from this day you are careful to live well and to serve this most gracious and benign Lady. Though you may have hitherto offended God she will procure you a sweet and happy death. And if at that moment you are greatly alarmed and lose confidence at the sight of your sins, she will come and encourage you as she has so many others. Let us, then, be of good heart though we be sinners; and let us feel assured that Mary will come and assist us at death, and by her presence comfort and console us, provided only that we serve her lovingly during the remainder of our life. Our Queen, addressing St. Matilda one day, promised to assist all her clients at death who, during life, had faithfully served her. "I a most tender Mother," said Mary, "will faithfully be present at the death of all who piously serve me and will console and protect them." O God, what a consolation will it be at that last moment of our lives, when our eternal lot has to be decided, to see the Queen of Heaven assisting and consoling us with the assurance of her protection!

O Consoler of the afflicted, console a poor creature who recommends himself to thee! The remorse of a burdened conscience fills me with affliction. I know not if I have sufficiently grieved for my sins. All my actions are imperfect and sullied. Hell awaits my death in order to accuse me: the outraged justice of God demands satisfaction. My Mother, what will become of me? If thou dost not help me I am lost. Wilt thou not succour me? O compassionate Virgin, console me! Obtain me true sorrow for my sins, and the strength to amend my life and be faithful to God during the rest of my days. When I am in the last agonies of death, O Mary, my hope, do not abandon me. Then, more than ever, help and encourage me that I may not despair at the sight of my sins which the devil will then place before my eyes. O my Queen, pardon my temerity and come thyself to console me by thy presence. Thou hast conferred this grace upon so many others, do not refuse it to me. If my boldness is great, greater still is thy goodness, for it

seeks out the most miserable in order to console them. It is this that gives me confidence. For thy eternal glory, be it said that thou hast snatched an unhappy creature from hell to which he was already condemned and hast led him into thy kingdom. O yes, sweet Mother, I hope to have the happiness of remaining always at thy feet in Heaven, thanking and blessing and loving thee for ever! O Mary, I shall expect thee at my last hour. Deprive me not of this consolation. So may it be! Amen. Amen.

In many churches the devout Exercises for a Happy Death are performed once a month, and with great and lasting profit to innumerable souls. A Plenary Indulgence can be gained by all the faithful who assist. These Exercises can be performed privately by each in his or her own home, and, as St. Alphonsus suggests, it would be well for all to do so at least *once a month*. The following is the usual order of the devout Exercises publicly or privately performed.

1. The Rosary of the Blessed Virgin is recited, or the Seven Joys and Sorrows of St. Joseph.
2. Then the Sermon, or a *Reading*, or a *Meditation* on Death. See Vol. I., Part I., pp. 28, 70, 270, 274, 370, etc.; Part II., pp. 1, 16, 19, 26, 31, 34, 61, 68, 75, 87, 126, 163.
3. Then the Prayer for a Happy Death, p. 381, after which a suitable hymn is sung—*e.g. God of Mercy and Compassion*, or a hymn to St. Joseph, patron of a happy death.
4. The Blessed Sacrament is then exposed for Benediction as usual, and after the *O Salutaris Hostia* the *Protestation for Death* is recited, p. 383. Then the *Tantum Ergo*, etc.

Plenary Indulgence, on the usual conditions, to all who on the *fourth Sunday* of the month assist at this devout Exercise in any Church of the Redemptorist Fathers. The prayers "Sorrows and Joys of St. Joseph," do not essentially belong to the Preparation for Death, and may therefore be omitted. They were composed by the Ven. Father Januarius Sarnelli, C.SS.R. (one of the first companions of St. Alphonsus), who in the year 1744 died at Naples in the odour of sanctity.

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